

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme in Manipur: An Appraisal

PC Sikligar*

**National Institute of Rural Development, North Eastern Regional Centre (NIRD-NERC) Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022, Assam, India.*

pcsikligar@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

The process of Community Mobilization especially in case of tribal community is not new. Tribal across the country have been supporting to each other in helping in construction of the house, sharing of contribution in happy and grief moment like marriage and death, sorting out problems of abduction of women, land dispute, kinship, ethical, etc by imposing social boycott of the guilty, expel from the village or by charging penalty. Village Chief, Mukhiya, Gameti who traditionally equipped in resolving of internal disputes. MGNREGS do not only promote community participation among the tribals but also support livelihood of such families which do not have substantial incomes round the year due to various reasons. It is obvious that tribals depend on primitive agriculture and forest resources which are no longer supporting them in the present circumstance to maintain livelihoods. This article makes analyses that due to implantation of MGNREGS in Churachandpur district of Manipur, the tribal participation in development process has improved in tune of mitigate unemployment and improve the living condition through developing infrastructure for common utilization. In the district an ordinary tribal family do not possess land as land belongs to village chief. The village chief by his own mercy involves somebody in agriculture on sharing basis. In the district, a couple of village chiefs came forward for plantation to avoid soil erosion with a common agenda. In addition to above assets like drainage, culvert and embankment have also been created under the scheme to over come with a problem of flood and soil erosion. The community as a whole feel that MGNREGS not only reduces problem of unemployment but tackle social unrest too. The representative of each household participates in the Gram Sabha which set planning and priorities the works. The process of social audit makes them equip with information and access to participate for common causes.

Keywords:

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 was passed unanimously in the Lok Sabha on 23rd August 2005. It came into force in 200 districts on 2nd February 2006. This Act has been launched in the form of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides legal right for 100 days of employment to each rural house hold whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

has been implemented through out the country phases-wise. In first phase 200 districts (most backward districts of the country), in second phase 130 districts whereas in third phase rest of the (265) districts were covered which classified as rural. This scheme has been implemented in 595 districts out of 614 districts. The scheme renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS) since October 02, 2009.

Objective of the Scheme

The main objective of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is to enhance livelihood security through generating assets, protecting environment, empowering rural women, reduce migration, fostering social equity. This scheme promotes: 1) Rural connectivity for all weather access including culverts and drainages wherever necessary, 2) Flood control and protection works including drainage in water logging areas, 3) Renovation of traditional water bodies including de-silting of tanks, 4) Land development/ reforms owned by the beneficiaries of Rural Housing Scheme namely Indira Awaas Yojana, 5) Irrigational canal including micro and minor irrigation works, 6) Drought proofing including afforestation and tree plantation, 7) Water conservation and water harvesting, and 8) other works which notify by the central government with the consultation, etc which promotes employment generation and land development works in the rural areas.

Profile of the district

The Churachandpur district occupies the South-Western part of Manipur State. This district is a largest district area-wise which covers 20.47 per cent of the geographical areas of the State. Similarly, district headquarters Churachandpur is second largest town next to capital Imphal. The important hill ranges of the district are Vangai, Kalim and lentange which run from north to south. Barak, Tuival, Khuga and Leimatak are the major rivers in the district. In the narrow strips of the valley wet rice cultivation is being practice. The district is predominantly inhabited by Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family belonging to mongoloid stock with certain pockets inhabited by minority Naga and non- tribe communities in small numbers. Over 15 tribes inhabited the district. Each tribe has a distinct social order as well as community laws. The system of hereditary chief-ship as well as community ownership of village land is prevalent in the district. In case of hereditary chief ship the economy of the village through its ownership of the

land but exercises social control over the households in the village. The district has got 228707 (2001 Census) of which 99 per cent of the populations belong to the tribal communities. The district has got tribal communities like Thadou, Hmar, Paite, Zou, Vaiphei, Smite, Gangte, Lushai, Komrem, etc. The district has recorded 74.64 per cent of the literacy rate in above Census. The district is divided into five sub-divisional and ten Tribal Development Blocks which are popularly known as Lamka, Henglep, Singnet, Vangai, Samupalpur, Tuibhong, Sangaikot, Tipainmukh, Thalm and Saikot.

Implementation of Scheme

In Manipur, MGNREGS has been implemented phase-wise. In first phase, one district namely Tamenglong was covered whereas in second phase two districts i.e. Chundel and Churachandpur were covered. In third phase rest of the six districts namely Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Senapti, Thoubal and Ukhrul were covered. In Churachandpur district, this scheme was launched on 30th April 2007. MGNREGS popularly known as "Job Card Scheme" is a heart propel scheme of the mass especially people living in the hilly region covering five districts of tribal population. During 2009-10, as many as 51,984 rural households were provided employment at the cost of ₹ 6876.75 Lakhs and it generated 51. 98 Lakh person days of employment. All the 10 Development Blocks of the district together performed 1250 works including water conservation (132), drought proofing (230), irrigation facility (153), land development (130), fold control (225), and rural connectivity (250).

The review has been designed to understand community mobilization for healthy out come of the scheme in terms of organization of the people in planning, execution of work, creation of assets, monitoring participation in social audit, etc

Objectives

- To identify the process of community mobilization for strengthening the scheme,

- ❑ To understand mechanism of implementation and monitoring of the scheme, and
- ❑ To study of impact of the scheme in tune of socio-economic development of the workers

To achieve above objectives the visit has been made for three blocks namely **Lamka, Saikot and Tuibuong**. In each block, two completed works and one on going work was visited. In addition to this, process of mobilization of the community in terms of assembling them, meeting, planning, execution of the works, monitoring, mode of payment, etc were discussed. In addition to that process of maintaining records especially block and village level also checked to understand the mechanism of maintaining records. As it is stated that MGNREGS in Churachandpur was initiated in 2007 therefore the performance of 2008-09 and 2009-10 were priorities to understand objective of the study. To understand impact of the scheme, in terms of socio-economic development of the workers, a focus group discussion with the workers was made in each of the visit sites.

Mobilization of the Community and Assets created under the Scheme

The district MGNREGS team has adopted process for empowering the people at the grass-root level. To fulfil the norms of bottom-up approach, the village authority submits shelf of work which is an alternative of the unproductive jhum cultivation, augmentation of water resources and creation of inter-village roads. In each village a loud speaker has been provided. One or two days prior to initiative of work the announcement is being made the loud speaker then almost all the employment seeker (job card holders) reach at site to participate in the work. It is found that due to lack of employment opportunity locally the participation under the scheme is quiet high or in other words cent percent involvement of the people has been recorded. The demand for job comes in bulk from entire village. The details of the adult members, social group of the family which seek employment under the scheme, job-card number, etc place in the employment register.

Under the scheme works like inter village road, culvert, embankment, drainages, ginger, rubber plantation, etc were created in both the consecutive years. The plantations have been made on such land which belongs to Village Chief as other individuals do not possess any piece of land. The entire implementation of MGNREGS is being done by village authority which is an equivalent of Panchayat as it is most effective method of reaching the assess instated of using line departments. People do not only share of work which carry out under the scheme but also participate in planning of the work and set priority of work. They discussed such issues in Gram Sabha meeting every year.

Convergence

Churachandpur town, the district headquarters which housed nearly two-third of the district's entire population was ravaged by the problem of water scarcity. The catchments areas of which are completely barren now due to the felling of trees for jhuming and timber are under taken for plantations. On this, an initiative was undertaken under the scheme to mobilize 11,478 job card holders from 64 villages who were directly dependent on local water resources for their livelihood. The forest department and primary health and engineering department (PHED) with their technical support planted 1,94,463 saplings on 48.62 hector of land across 10 villages. The concerned Chiefs have signed an agreement with the district Rural Development Agency (DRDA) not to fell trees forthwith on the areas covered by the plantation. In this process the traditional methods like identification of native saplings, traditional bund fencing to prevent forest fire of growing were utilize to avoid ecological imbalance.

The district have successfully experimented the convergence of Public Distribution System (PDS) and MGNREGS in 2009. Under the plan District Rural Development Society has provided subsidized rice against part of the wages earned under the scheme. The district MGNREGS team has also covered State's irrigation and food control through a non- governmental organization for digging

of distribution canals from the main canal. The programme was the first convergence approach in the district which was incorporated in second year of implementation of the scheme. 3000 hectare of wet paddy fields under Lamka and Saikot blocks were completed successfully. In this process, the people of the 25 villages were involved who got 35 days of employment.

Monitoring mechanism

In each village, village Monitoring Committee is being constituted which look matter of quality of work, verity of work, random check of job card, participate in social audit, etc. The availability of six surplus months results in huge demand for employment under MGNREGS and ensures large scope for realizing the full 100 days of employment guaranteed on the Act. On this criterion, the district team has provided 100 of employment to all the job card holders during 2008-09 and 2009-10. The chiefs being sovereign over their land, an effective mechanism was formulated to specifically monitor the system of utilizing the funds and ensure transparency by forming the Village Monitor Committee (VMC). The Village Monitoring Committee (VMC) constitutes five members in its body like religious leader, a renowned social workers, an educator villager, a member village youth club and a member of women organization. The members of VMC obtained special training on how to go about in ensuring transparency on implementation of the scheme in their village.

Provision of mates and basic facility at site

The provision has been made to appoint a mat on 100 workers. Male and female both function as mat belonging to the same locality they could be either middle passed or metric failed. The mates are being given exposure training for three days at block level in favour of maintaining of records of muster roll work-wise which cross checks by the technical assistance/section officer. Mates also get exposures of attendance process, measurement of works, handling of first aid box, etc. During training period each one of them was given stipend of ₹ 100 a day.

Special care is taken in maintaining of accountability and transparency by proper maintenance of muster roll. In Churachandpur district care has been taken that required worksite facilities such as first aid kit, tarpaulin, crèche loud speaker, drinking water, etc are provided at work site. Similarly, Block Development Officer/ Programme Officer and District Programme Coordinator are also actively involved in random checking and inspection in the area which are motorable.

Minimum wage rate and mode of payment

Unlike other States, the wage rate under MGNREGS in Manipur is being paid ₹ 81.40 which is equivalent of the State government's minimum wage. Each worker under MGNREGS works seven hours a day. At national level ₹ 100 is being paid under the scheme. The mode of payment is varies from one to other block. Out of ten blocks, the workers of three blocks namely Lamka, Saikot and Tuibuong get wages through banks and post offices. The post offices are accessible but banks are located only semi urban pocket which lead a problem for the workers to approach frequently. Moreover, workers have to visit more than one time to collect wages. The post department takes time for making of the payment whereas banks make await for a longer time even two-three day. Both the systems have been introduced to cover short fall in making of the payment to the workers but had become a time consuming factor. In Manipur, the workers believe on their village chiefs, Mates and Members of Village Monitoring Committee therefore, they want to take remuneration on cash. The disbursement of cash is prevalent in other seven blocks of the district.

Maintenance of records and submission of plan

The blocks keep records of labour budget, perspective plan, annual plan, list of due wage, work order, cash book, muster roll issue register, job card registration, monthly progress report, estimate of the works, work site photo graphs, etc. Other records are available with the village chief. Planning, monitoring and social audit are the centric

points of the scheme. Through verification of the records, it is found that annual plans which were submitted under the fold of perspective plan were changed frequently which shows that priority of the work is changing. In response to the same it is brought to notice that earlier plans which submitted under the fold of perspective plan are not relevant in present circumstance therefore, plans need to change based on present priorities. The major impact of the MGNREGS in terms of mobilization of people is that it has activated gram sabhas. This scheme ensures minimum two gram sabhas in a year for discussing various issues of the scheme like planning, social audit, etc.

Social audit

Social audit is process of making aware people about relevant information and procuring transparency. Planning and social audit both are the key factors of healthy out put of the MGNREGS. The district authority makes arrangement of social audit once in a year. In the process of social audit representatives of youth club, religious leader, social worker, educated person of the village, women, mates, village chiefs, etc along with village secretary, technical assistance, programme officer, representatives of line departments used to assemble at village level to discuss on various issues and make physical verification of the works, documents, payment entered in the job cards, muster rolls, facility created at the site during work, etc. The village chief chairs entire gamut of social audit.

Migration

In tribal dominated area land ownership remains in the hands of village chief therefore other families of the village depend on non- agricultural activities. Based on desire of the village chief the piece of land allocate to the interested families which share crops based on oral agreement. As it is stated above that Churachandpur district falls under hilly province therefore practice of shifting cultivation is common. Those who are unable to make compromise with the chief they look forward for other options for

livelihoods. This depends on the relationship with the village chief. In such situation, most of the adult used to try employment (as casual labourer) at block and district headquarters but which is depending on demand and supply of labour force to the great extent but after implementation of MGNREGS most of the families which were depending on out side employment market now get employment under the scheme in the village itself. This scheme has provided 100 days of employment in 2009-10 whereas in 2010-11 this scheme (till January 2011) has created 45 days of employment. The employment in general, depends on the flow of funds which releases by the Government of India. The Government of India contributes 90 per cent of allocation whereas rest of the 10 per cent is borne by the State government. Migration of the workforce is not seasonal or tenure based rather than confined up to the block or district level where labour can move every day between working place and home.

Expectation of the people

Most of the workforce under MGNREGS desires to have more employment under the scheme. They however brought to notice that this scheme is boon for them as they do not have other mode of livelihoods. Similarly, they were keen to get higher wage compared to Rs 81.40 which has been determined by the State government in tune of minimum wage in the State. But in case MGNREGS, Government of India has enhanced wage rate up to ₹ 100 per day since October 2009 without gender discrimination. The workers have shown interest to collect wages locally to avoid time taking process by intuitional mechanism. They have shown believe on the functionaries involved in implementation of the works. The scheme has inclined people to work in group for development of their own areas and own facilities with creative mind set which is healthy for the national building. In addition to wage rate, they were keen to get employment between 100 and 150 days due to lack of alternative mode of livelihoods.

Division of Family

The Tribal communities, in general follow nuclear family system which consists of husband, wife and their own children. After marriage of the son parents make separate him so he can perpetuate his responsibility in maintaining his own family until and unless he is not younger one who needs to take care of the parents in old age. The separated son(s) live in an around of the parents residence with a little privacy. When the son gets separated from the parents then he approaches for the separate job card so employment could be grabbed under the scheme. This is applicable in case of such family which has got more than a single son. To get employment under the scheme the concept of nuclear family system has been emerged in the recent years. This concept is not confined among the tribals (even though they prefer nuclear family system) but in general other communities in the rural areas follow the same system mean breaking of joint family system because of grabbing benefit of the rural development schemes especially benefit of rural housing scheme (IAY).

Utilization of incomes

Most of the assets like drainage, plantation, embankment, approach road, and culvert were created for community benefit which helped directly to promote incomes of the workers. The income of 100 days (Rs 8140 yearly by each of the household @ 81.40 per day) which generated under the scheme helped workers to meet expenditure of household chores, education for the children, health, social occasion, etc. Most of the workers send children to the private educational institution which is costlier. The workers however, revealed that they have got changes in social life due to implementation of the scheme.

Role of Women

In tribal community women are an equal partner of the economy. In Churachandpur district the women participation under the scheme has been recorded 49.6 per cent in 2010 which is slightly lesser than

their men counterpart but in the practice women participation is quite healthy. In must roll entry of the person is being made on the name of husband (who is main breadwinner/head of the house) but in real sense women participate largely under the scheme whereas men concentrate on routine work or look forward for casual work in adjoining areas. Involvement of women under MGNREGS promotes substitute income to the family which is helpful in enhancing of the family status.

Conclusion

The community participation for employment and creating infrastructure in the village premises has become popular in Churachandpur district of Manipur. The tribal who do not own any source of livelihood look forward to get regular employment under MGNREGS. Under the scheme, assets like drainages, culverts, embankment, etc have been created which are durable in nature. The imitative of flood control and social erosion have also been taken by the convincing of group of village chiefs. The district authorities under the scheme had created 100 of employment in 2009-10. People are keen to get more employment due to non-availability of other mode of livelihoods. The workers are also looking forward to get higher wage (Rs. 100/-) which is prescribed by the Government of India. They are keen to get wages in the village itself by cash rather than approaching institutional mechanism which makes delay and promotes visits to get remuneration.

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