ASSESSMENT OF BENEFITS AND PROBLEMS OF MGNREGA IN KARAMADAI BLOCK IN COIMABATORE DISTRICT

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Abstract

Traditionally, "development" refers to the capacity of a national economy to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP). In the 1950s and 1960s a large number of the Third World countries, including India, achieved their growth targets, but the levels of living and quality of life of the masses for the most part remained unchanged (Todaro 1985). This somber situation caused the "dethronement" of the GNP from the definition of development. In 1970s economic development was redefined in terms of elimination of poverty, inequality, unemployment, disease and illiteracy (Seers 1969). Therefore, development is now 'conceived of as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty' (Todaro 1985).

Keywords: national economy, gross national product, unemployment, illiteracy, economic growth, poverty

Introduction

In view of the persistence of chronic poverty, perpetual malnutrition, pre-mature death, illiteracy, poor housing and mounting unemployment, Todaro have conceptualized "development" as 'the sustained elevation of an entire society and social system toward a "better" or "more human" life'. He, in fact, has emphasized the timeless concept of "good life" as the perpetual goal of humankind. He succinctly outlines three objectives of development.

 i)   Life sustenance: the ability to provide the basic needs,
 ii)   Self-esteem, and
 iii)   Freedom from servitude: to be able to choose

He thus concludes that 'development is both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has, through some combination of social economic and institutional processes, secured the means for obtaining a better life' (Todaro, 1985).

Tribal Development in India

In India, planned development at the national level started in true sense only after Independence. During the British rule, when the Indian economy as a whole was near stagnant the tribal areas were generally kept secluded and out of the normal process of administration and economic action. There was little infrastructure in the tribal areas excepting in a few pockets. The character of the tribal policy of the British government was the isolation of tribal people from the rest of the population. Some welfare programmes and legislations were enacted and implemented by the British during the pre-independence period to mitigate the sufferings of the tribal's and prevent their exploitation by the outsiders. However, there was no deliberate attempt to strengthen the economic base of these down-trodden backward communities in the country. It was only after the country became independent that the leaders began to talk in terms of planned economic and social development.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (Mahatma Gandhi NREGA) was notified on September 7, 2005. The mandate of the Act is to provide 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The basic objectives of the programme are i) social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India; ii) livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity; iii) drought proofing and flood management in rural India; iv) empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially women, scheduled castes and schedules tribes, through the processes of a rights-based legislation; v) strengthening decentralised, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives; vi) deepening democracy at the grass-roots by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions; and vii) effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance Thus, Mahatma Gandhi NREGA is a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. (Mihir Shah Committee, 2012).

Scope of the Study

India is one of the countries having a large concentration of tribal population. It ranks second in the world, next only to Africa. The extremely economic and educational backwardness of the tribes in the country has drawn the attention of the policy-makers even prior to Independence. The Constitutional provisions and legislative measures both during the British rule and during the post-independent period to protect the tribal rights and property, had a significant bearing on the overall tribal economy, but they failed to make any impact on the economic conditions of the tribal population.

After the initiation of the planned development, many programmes were implemented for the socio-economic up-liftment of the tribal population both by the State

and the Central Government. Despite these initiatives, the tribal populations are lagging behind the rest of the population. The scenario is clearly attributed to indebtedness, land alienation, poverty, unemployment, health problems, weak education and displacement of the tribal people. The MGNREGA is the latest in a series of poverty alleviation programmes undertaken by the government, which would have a beneficial impact on health, education and other determinants of social welfare by breaking the cycle of poverty in tribal areas.

Research Gap

Only a few studies have been undertaken during the past years on tribal development in India. These research attempts were directed (Sinha B.K.P. and Minaketan Behera (2009), Soumya Mohanty and Nihar Ranjan Mishra (2012), etc.,) at analyzing the impact of employment programs on tribal's socioeconomic status and very few studies have been done at the micro level in the state of Tamil Nadu. The present study, a modest attempt to explain the employment status of tribal population in Coimbatore district, is an effort to collect research and evidence on their present conditions at the micro level.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the socioeconomic profile and living conditions of the tribal households.
- To ascertain the attitude of the respondents about the MGNREGA schemes and make appropriate recommendations thereon.

Hypothesis

- Tribal households are characterized by large family size, low literacy, high dependency ratio and extremely low income.
- MGNREGA scheme has enhanced socio-economic status and community life of the tribal households.
- The major hurdles faced by the households were work-related issues, corruption, low remuneration and social insecurity.

Earlier Studies

Sanjay Kumar Lenka and Amaresh Samantaraya (2010) evaluated the impact of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). Based on primary data on various economic indicators of tribal households in Koraput District of Orissa, it was observed that the stated objectives of the program are not adequately met. Particularly, the sample beneficiaries have marginally gained in terms of better employment opportunities, while benefits in terms of real income and expenditure were very modest. This underscores the need for redesigning and enlarging the scope of the government-run programs in terms of promoting active involvement of beneficiaries, removing institutional bottlenecks, better information dissemination, and provision of basic infrastructure for transportation, storage and marketing of the finished products. Probably, more autonomy to district-level authorities in design and implementation of such development programs, keeping in mind the region specific needs and prospects, would be very effective.

Jha Rewati Raman (2011) examined the impact of MGNREGA on the generation of employment, development of assets and provision of income to the rural people of Bihar in general and the district Darbhanga in particular. The study was based on the secondary data collected from various published sources for the years 2008–09, 2009– 10 and 2010–11. The study revealed that both in Bihar as well as Darbhanga district all the households who demanded employment were provided employment under MGNREGA. The percentage of participation of scheduled castes has been substantial, 45–50 per cent in terms of person-days. The percentage of women's participation in Bihar was around 30 per cent in 2008–09 and 2009–10 but has increased to 44 per cent in 2010–11. The percentage of expenditure on wages under MGNREGA works had been quite substantial during the years under study, 63 to 67 per cent in Bihar and 60 to 69 per cent in the Darbhanga district and also its revealed that MGNREGA had provided ample opportunities of employment for the women and weaker sections of the society, had increased their income levels and had reduced poverty level in Darbhanga district as well as in Bihar state.

Ahuja Usha Rani et al., (2011) investigated the impact of implementation of MGNREGA in two districts - one agriculturally-advanced (Karnal) and the other agriculturally-backward (Mewat). Besides demographic characteristics, they investigated the difference in the employment status, income, landholding size, herd size and other assets of the sample farm households in these two districts by taking 120 farm families, 60 from each district. The impact of MGNREGA within a district was studied in terms of income and employment security, migration, debt repayment, extent of participation in MGNREGA works, socio-economic status, etc. by seeking information from 30 participating and 30 non-participating households in MGNREGA works in each district. The study found that in the extent of employment under MGNREGA works in agriculturally-advanced Karnal was 13.7 percent and in agriculturally-backward Mewat districts it was 24.6 percent. The study observed that despite being a source of employment, MGNREGA had not checked the migration from the developed region because of higher market wage rates at destinations. The study concluded that farmers owning large size of land holdings and number of animals were not much interested in participating in MGNREGA works.

Rebecca Holmes et al., (2011) in their study on "An opportunity for change, Gender analysis of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act", found important intended and unintended impacts on men and women at the individual, household and community level. Women have relatively good access to MGNREGA employment in Madhya Pradesh, exceeding the one-third quota for participation, at 44.2 per cent. Women also earn significantly higher wages from MGNREGA, as a result of its equal wage policy. In private agricultural employment, women received approximately Rs.30 and men up to Rs.45 a day. Under MGNREGA, both receive approximatelyRs.90 a day. Women's increased contribution to household income also supports their 'practical needs', as they are largely responsible for immediate household needs. However, while the Act

stipulates that households are entitled to 100 days of employment and equal wages, a closer look at the number of days of work provided and the actual provision of wages suggests a more unequal picture. Women receive few days' work because they were not allocated all the types of work available and are often assigned 'soft' work, such as moving soil dug out of wells, which requires less time. Their findings suggested that women's employment in MGNREGA has improved the economic status of some women and enhanced their decision-making power slightly in some households. This relates mostly to decisions on the food purchased for household consumption. In other cases, MGNREGA employment has had no impact on household relationships. This may be, in part, because women do not have automatic access to MGNREGA payment through individual or joint bank accounts, as the opening of bank accounts was implemented at the discretion of the local government. In some cases, women's employment in MGNREGA has exacerbated household tensions, with work putting pressure on the amount of women's time for household duties. While women work more hours than men, by combining domestic and productive work, MGNREGA has no provision for flexible working hours to ease their time pressures or support their dual responsibilities.

Soumya Mohanty and Nihar Ranjan Mishra (2012) attempted to critically examine the implementation process of MGNREGA and its impact on tribal livelihoods i.e. to what extent MGNREGS has given justice in sustaining the livelihoods of poor tribal communities in a tribal dominated panchayat of Sundargarh district, Odisha. The study revealed that there was little impact of MGNREGA on tribal livelihoods. The faulty implementation strategy has ruined the spirit of this programme. Religion and street biasness and favoritism in case of distribution of job cards, dominance of dominant families, defective leadership and improper coordination among the stakeholders have stood as major hurdles in this programme.

One common lacuna was that many studies were case studies covering tribal problems in general. Further, as stated earlier, the effectiveness and impact of the development programmes have not been thoroughly evaluated in the country except in a few pockets. These studies fail to bring out the chronic inadequacies in the implementation of the programmes. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate thoroughly the development programmes so as to identify the lacunae in the implementation or the breach of norms at the level of implementation. Hence, in the present study an attempt was made to evaluate the impact of MGNREGA in generating employment in the tribal area.

Methodology

Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of the sample households. In the first stage, Tholampalayam Panchayat was selected since nearly 40 percent of the population belongs to scheduled tribe and MGNERGA was in operation. The study of the universe consisted of all tribal households residing in the Tholampalayam village in Karamadai block in Coimbatore district. In the second stage, out of 24 villages in

Tholampalayam panchayat, 11 villages were selected. In the third stage from these 11 villages, 150 households were selected by adopting the purposive sampling technique as not all the households were willing to co-operate with the investigator and due to time constraints. Hence the investigator approached only those households who were the beneficiaries of MNRERGA scheme and who were willing to cooperate and supply the needed information. To the selected tribal households, a pretested interview schedule was administered to collect the needed information. The field investigation and data collection for the study was carried out during the period February – March 2012.

For concise presentation of the information collected, the respondents were classified on the basis of per-capita income into two groups, namely, (i) BPL households whose monthly per capita income was less than ` 639; and (ii) APL households whose monthly per capita income was more than ` 639. The cut-off limit was determined on the basis of the Tendulkar Committee Report which defined below poverty line family as those earning less than ` 639 per month in rural areas of Tamil Nadu (2009-10). Data collected were tabulated and analyzed for the purpose of giving precise and concise information. Besides, percentages and graphs, Likerts' Summated scale and Factor analysis were applied.

Empirical Findings

Socio-economic Profile

Out of 150 households surveyed 27 percent of the households belonged to BPL category and the remaining 73 percent belonged to APL category. A majority (98 percent) of the respondents were Hindus. About 85 percent of the respondents in the BPL households were married and 15 percent respondents were widows while in APL households 92 percent of the respondents were married, 7 percent of the respondents were widows and 1 per cent of the respondents were unmarried. Out of 150 households surveyed 93 percent were headed by a male member and the remaining 7 per cent had female as the head of the family. The average size of the family was marginally higher (3.73) for APL households than for the BPL households (2.35). The dependency ratio was significantly higher for BPL households (26) when compared to APL households (18). Among the BPL households 78 percent were illiterate and 22 percent were literate. Among the APL households 84 percent were illiterate and 16 percent were literate. About 95 percent of the BPL households were engaged in farm activity while this percentage was 73 percent among the APL households. About 5 percent of the BPL households and 24 percent of the APL households were engaged in non-farm activity. While 3 percent of the APL households were unemployed, the proportion of unemployed people among the BPL households was nil. Majority (88 percent) of the BPL households belonged to the income bracket of less than ` 1500, while 80 percent of the APL households were earning more than ` 2500 per month.

Living Conditions

Table 1 Details on Housing Conditions
(In percentage)

S.No	Particulars	BPL households	APL households	All
1	Ownership of the house:			
	Own	95.0	97.3	96.7
	Rented	5.0	2.7	3.3
2	Size of the house plots (in sq.mt):			
	18.67 to 20.23	95.0	97.3	96.7
	20.23 and above	5.0	2.7	3.3
3	Type of house:			
	Kachcha	2.5	3.6	3.3
	Semi-pucca	65.0	34.5	42.7
	Pucca	32.5	61.9	54.0
4	Type of roof:			
	Leaf	2.5	1.8	2.0
	Tile	42.5	23.6	28.7
	Concrete	55.0	74.6	69.3
5	Type of wall:			
	Leaf	2.5	0.0	0.6
	Mud	17.5	13.6	14.7
	Brick	80.0	86.4	84.7
6	Type of floor:			
	Mud	7.5	4.5	5.3
	Cement	92.5	94.6	94.0
	Tiles	0.0	0.9	0.7
7	Number of rooms:			
	1 to 2 rooms	97.5	96.4	96.7
	3 to 4 rooms	2.5	3.6	3.3
8	Availability of electricity:			
	Electrified	95.0	98.2	97.3
	Not electrified	5.0	1.8	2.7

Source: Field Survey, 2012

The quality of a house is assessed in terms of ownership of the house, size of the house plot, type of house, nature of its roof, floor and walls, the availability of electricity and latrine, fuel used for cooking and availability of safe drinking water. Table 1.1 presents details on the living arrangements of the selected sample respondents. The details on the ownership of the dwelling revealed that 95 per cent of the BPL households and 97 per cent of the APL households lived in their own houses and the remaining in rented houses. About 95 per cent of the BPL households and 97 per cent of the APL households were living in an area which was 18.67 Sq.mt - 20.23 Sq.mt and remaining households were living in an area of 20.23 Sq.mt and above. The smaller area of living indicates the poor economic status of the households. The analysis of type of residential houses reveals that only a negligible proportion of the BPL (3 percent) and APL (4 percent) lived in kutcha houses. More than half of the households (54 percent) lived in pucca houses. Thus, the governmental assistances may have enabled these households to live in better type of houses. About 55 percent of the BPL families and 75

per cent of the APL families were living under concrete roof and 43 per cent of the BPL families and 24 per cent of the APL families had tiles as roofing materials. About 93 per cent of the BPL families and 95 per cent of APL families had cement flooring. Only 4 percent of the APL households were living in houses with 3-4 rooms while this percentage was 2 percent for the BPL. Overall, nearly 97 percent of the tribal households had poor living space in their houses. More than 90 per cent of the BPL and APL families have electricity and the remaining 5 per cent of the BPL families and 2 per cent of the APL families goes without electricity.

About 100 per cent of BPL households and APL households use firewood for cooking, which emits smoke and pollutes the environment, leading to diseases such as asthma, lung cancer, bronchitis and other respiratory problems. The increased use of firewood may be attributed to the proximity of tribal households to forest resources. The major source for drinking water was public tap (100 per cent) for the residents. All the respondents have unanimously stated that they have no access to toilet facilities. Thus, the living conditions of the respondents were quite unhygienic.

Benefits of MGNREGA Scheme

MGNREGA is the most ambitious scheme of the Government of India to tackle the unemployment problem and enhance the living standards of the tribal community, Narayanasamy and Boraian (2009) in their study found that the benefits of the scheme as perceived by the community has guaranteed employment, sufficient family income and so on. Hence in the present study the benefits of MGNREGA were identified and the respondents were asked to state their opinion on a five point scale, namely, strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The responses were given the weights as 5,4,3,2 and1. Cronbach's Alpha test, conducted for all constructs to determine the internal consistency across items, was found to 0.8704, exceeding the minimum alpha of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). This indicates good reliability of all items. Having established the consistency of the items, factor analysis was used to identify the underlying pattern of relationship between the various dimensions of benefits. To determine the underlying structure, the correlation matrix was initially examined to determine how appropriate it was for factor analysis. The Kaiser - Meyer - Oklin (KMO) value was 0.65, which was higher than the recommended minimum of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974) indicating the sample size was adequate for applying factor analysis. In addition Bartlett's test for sphericity (x^2 = 1079.80) was significant supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix and the associated significance level was extremely small (0.00). The communalities for each variable was assessed to determine the amount of variance accounted by the variables to be included in the factor rotations and all the variables had values greater than 0.50 signifying substantial portion of the variance are accounted by the factors. Table 1.2 enlists

the eigen value, their relative explanatory powers and factor loadings for 14 linear components identified within the data set.

Table 2 Rotated Component Matrix- Benefits of the Programme

Benefits of the programme	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Enhancement of Income				
Improve Living security	0.9609			
Improve Household consumption		0.9200		
Improve basic health services				
Improve basic education				
Improve access to credit				
Decreased HH tensions b/w men and women	0.8782			
Decreased HH tensions b/w young and old		0.9023		
Imp participation in the community				0.7127
Improved women's				
Reduced social exclusion			0.8490	
Reduced discrimination	0.9110			
Betterment of village			0.8917	
Reduced distress migration				
Eigen values	3.429	2.696	2.012	1.318
Percentage of variance	24.496	19.254	14.375	9.417
Cumulative percentage	24.496	43.750	58.125	67.542

The Eigen value for the first four factors was greater than one indicating these factors alone were appropriate for inclusion in the analysis. These five factors together accounted for nearly 68 percent of the variations in the factors. Factor one had significant loadings on two dimensions, namely, 'improved living security' and 'decreased household tensions between men and women' and' reduced discrimination' and together representing better socio-economic environment. The first factor accounted for nearly 25 percent of the variations.

Factor two had significant loadings for two dimensions, namely, 'improved household consumption' and 'decreased household tensions between young and old' (representing better socio-economic environment) and together accounted for nearly 19 percent of the variance. Factor three had significant loadings on two dimensions, namely, 'reduced social exclusion' (representing better socio-economic environment) and 'betterment of village' (better community life) and these factors accounted for nearly 14 percent of the variations. Factor four had significant loading

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Negative impacts of MGNREGA

Narayanasamy and Boraian (2009) in their study found that the beneficiaries of MNREGA did face certain problems like difficulty to strictly adhere to the time schedule, lack of facilities in the area of work, etc. In the present study the respondents were asked to indicate the negative impacts of the programme and the extent of conflict they faced in terms of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The responses were given the weights as 5,4,3,2 and 1.

Table 3 Rotated Component Matrix– Negative Impacts of the Programme

Negative impacts of the programme	Component		
	1	2	3
Transfer is inadequate		0.9126	
Too time consuming	0.8569		
Benefits only one type of family			
Does not lead to sustainable change		0.8823	
Creates tension between family members			
Not flexible to HH activities			
Not flexible to productivity activity			
Not adequately to prevailing social norms			
Another prog. more suitable			
Wages are not paid on time			
wages are not paid full	0.7609		
Uncertainty about where they get work			
Money is siphoned off	0.7923		
Distress migration			0.7804
No child care provision			
Eigen values	5.618	1.877	1.290
Percentage of variance	37.452	12.517	8.600
Cumulative percentage	37.452	49.968	58.568

Cronbach's Alpha estimated for all constructs to determine the internal consistency across items was found to 0.7423, exceeding the minimum alpha of 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978). This indicates good reliability of all items. Factor analysis was applied to determine the underlying pattern of relationship between various dimensions of problems associated with MGNREGA and whether these factors can be grouped in terms of a composite variable.

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, Rotation converged in 6 iterations, Source: Estimation based on Field Survey

To determine the underlying structure, the correlation matrix was initially examined to determine how appropriate it was for factor analysis. The Kaiser – Meyer - Oklin (KMO) value was 0.83 which was higher than the recommended minimum of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974) indicating the sample size was adequate for applying factor analysis. In addition Bartlett's test for sphericity (x^2 = 1023.56) was significant supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix and the associated significance level was extremely small (0.00). The communalities for each variable was assessed to determine the amount of variance accounted by the variables to be included in the factor rotations and all the variables had values greater than 0.50 signifying substantial portion of the variance are accounted by the factors. Table 4.20 enlists the eigen value, their relative explanatory powers and factor loadings for 15 linear components identified within the data set.

Factor one had significant loadings for three dimensions namely 'too time consuming' (work related issue); 'wages are not paid in full and 'money is siphoned off' (corruption issue). These dimensions together explained nearly 37 percent of the variance. Factor two has significant loadings for two dimensions namely 'transfer is inadequate' and 'does not lead to sustainable change', representing low remuneration and explained nearly 12 percent of the variance. Factor three has significant loadings for one dimension namely 'no letup on distress migration' (social insecurity) and explained 8 percent of the variance.

The major concerns expressed by the respondents were dissatisfaction with work, corruption in the implementation of the scheme, low remuneration and lack of security. Hence to make the programme more effective in enhancing the status of the tribal households the government should take effective measures to address these issues and concerns.

Conclusion

To sum up, the major issues addressed by the MGNREGA according to the selected respondents were enhancement of socio-economic environment and better community life and the major concerns expressed were dissatisfaction with work, corruption in the implementation of the scheme, low remuneration and lack of security. Hence to make the programme more effective in enhancing the status of the tribal households the government should take effective measures to address these issues and concerns. In this context, the following recommendations are made:

- For effective implementation of the programme a comprehensive plan of action needs to be formulated by taking into consideration the tribal specific issues such as high rate of illiteracy, lack of employment and income generating activities, land alienation, indebtedness, distress migration, displacement etc.
- Job cards should be issued to the households on the basis of their economic status.
- Above all, the success of any programme of this nature depends on an increase in political consciousness along with awareness among the poorest section of the society.

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