



RESEARCH ARTICLE

WORKING OF MGNREGS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SENAPATI DISTRICT OF MANIPUR, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a flagship programme of the Government of India that directly touches the lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth. It is a paradigm shift from earlier programme of anti-poverty alleviation programme which enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Government of India, 2008). The paper discusses the working of MGNREGS in a village and brings out lack of accountability and monitoring system at the village level.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a flagship programme of the Government of India that directly touches the lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth. It is an anti-poverty alleviation programme. It is the first ever law that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. Its objective is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work (Government of India, 2008). Its auxiliary objective is to strengthen natural resource management through works that address the causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion and thereby encouraging sustainable development. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was passed in the parliament on February 2, 2006, and the scheme was implemented in a phased manner. In Phase I, it was introduced in 200 most backward districts of the country. In phase II, additional 130 districts were covered during 2007-2008. In phase III, the Act was notified in the remaining rural districts of India on April 1, 2008. It was extended to all rural areas of India with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population.

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In Manipur, in its Phase I, MGNREGS was launched in Tamenglong district. In Phase II, it was extended to Churachandpur and Chandel districts in 2007-08. In Phase III, all the remaining 6 districts of the state namely Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Senapati and Ukhul were covered in 2008. The present study area i.e. Senapati district was covered during Phase III. Various studies were done on MGNREGS and had discussed the pros and cons of the scheme. The present paper is an ethnographic study of the working of MGNREGS in a Mao Naga village of Manipur, India and brings out lack of accountability and monitoring system at the village level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Senapati is predominantly a tribal district having 786 villages with 84 percent tribal population. The major inhabitants of the district are Mao, Maram, Poumai, Thangal, Thadou, Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei, Tangkhul, Chiru, Maring, and Nepalese. Meiteilon, also known as Manipuri language, is the official language of Manipur state is used as the lingua franca for communication in the district. The district is divided into eight sub-divisions. And six legislative constituencies. The paper is a case study of a Mao village which falls under Senapati district of Manipur, India. The Mao is a major Naga tribe in Manipur. They are a recognized 'Scheduled Tribe' under the Constitution Scheduled Tribes order of 1950. Fieldwork was

conducted by employing interview, schedule and observation techniques.

MGNREGS in Senapati District

In Senapati district, MGNREGS was implemented in Phase III. 2008-2009 was the first year of its implementation. The scheme envisages a collaborative partnership between the central government, the state governments, the panchayats and the local community. Broadly, the main implementation activities are at the village and block levels, while coordination activities are mainly at the block and district levels. Planning, supervision and monitoring take place at all levels (village, block, district and state). At each level, the concerned authorities are accountable to the community. District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) headed by the Executive Director oversees the implementation of MGNREGS in Senapati district. It monitors the work inspections, disbursement and utilization of funds, sending reports to the state and central government, give technical supports to the block staff and even the village level, maintenance of accounts, data entry and any other such work related to MGNREGS. There are eight blocks in Senapati district and the implementation of this scheme at the intermediate level is done in these eight blocks. At the block level, the Block Development Officer/Programme Officer is the implementing agency who supervises, guides, monitors, releases funds, and inspects the Village Authorities, the statutory body in the village executing the MGNREGS works. The block staffs help and assist the Village Authorities to prepare their work plans and all the technical support required by the latter. At the village level, the Village Authorities is the sole implementing as well as the executing agency.

MGNREGS at Makhel Village

Makhel village is covered during phase III of its implementation. It was implemented in 2008 but the actual works begin in 2009. Makhel village has 250 households and a total population of 1217 out of which 628 are male and 589 are female. The Makhel Village Authority is the sole implementing agency in the village. It is a statutory body constituted according to the Manipur Village Authority (in Hill Areas) Act of 1956. Under the leadership of Chairman and Secretary of the Village Authority, every household in the village have a job card for the 100 days wage employment scheme under MGNREGS. By 2013, after the government notification order, every job card holder in the village has a bank account. However, till 2016, the fund was transferred into the joint account of the Chairman and Secretary of the Village Authority which is opened solely for the purpose of MGNREGS. Looking into the requirement of the people, the Makhel Village Authority writes projects, generally three projects in a year. They make necessary plans for the works to be carried out under the project. First, the project proposal is submitted to the Block Development Officer or Programme Officer at Tadubi and after it is processed and passed, then it is forwarded to the District Programme Coordinator, the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) at Senapati. Under the District Programme Coordinator, there is an Assistant Programme Officer (APO) who looks after the overall monitoring and implementation of MGNREGS in the district. Once the project is accepted at the DRDA office and according to the availability of fund, DRDA sanctions fund for the project. The fund is transferred into the joint account of Chairman and

Secretary of the Village Authority. The project works consist mostly of infrastructural development work in the village. According to the demand of the work, the Village Authority specifies the number of person from each household for the MGNREGS work to be engaged on a particular day. Sometimes depending on the types of work, the Village Authority informs the villagers whether the project works require more men or women in order to carry out the proposed works successfully. The villagers informed that most women were engaged as workers under MGNREGS works in the village. The Village Authority maintains an attendance register. At the time of distribution of wages, looking into the register and according to the amount of fund received, Chairman and Secretary decide the amount of wages for a household and gave the wages to the villager.

Development Works carried out under MGNREGS in Makhel village

2008-2009

- Minor Irrigation: Constructed a *kutcha* minor irrigation from Barak River (the main source of water for paddy cultivation) to Mizü paddy field. The distance of the canal was about one and a half kilometres from the river to the paddy field.
- Intra-village Road: A *kutcha* road on which Shaktiman truck can play was constructed from Kashilijü (the main connecting link road to the paddy field for the people) to Tuder, a few kilometres away from the village. It is about 2 kilometres in distance. Kashilijü is a state highway on the southern side of the village. It connects with most of the paddy field of the three neighbouring villages of Makhel, Kaibi and Charanho. These three neighbouring villages have the best paddy field among the Mao people. One of the best paddy fields of Makhel village is located at Tuder.
- Tree Sapling plantation: The villagers had planted tree saplings like oak, alder, neem and eucalyptus under MGNREGS project at Mishotsü which is about 3 kilometres south of the village. However, due to improper fencing and lack of maintenance, wildfire had burned down the area and the project was not successful.

2009-2010

- Intra-village Road: A connecting *kutcha* road from Mishotsü to Tuder, about a distance of 2 kilometres was constructed.
- *Pucca* drainage was constructed from the entrance of the village to the centre of the village covering a distance of 1 kilometre.
- Land development: A retention wall was built along the main road of the village.

2010-2011

- Land development at Pfuneto mati, around 2 kilometres south of the village. JCB excavator was used for digging and removal of big boulders. Levelling was done by the wage earners i.e. the villagers.
- *Pucca* drainage on the eastern side of the village, covering a distance of 1 kilometre was constructed.

- *Kutch* road connecting Kashilijü with Mizü was constructed. A big area of paddy field belonging to Makhel people is located at Mizü.

2011- 2012

- Land development: Manual levelling of ground was done at Mari Tokhu.
- 10 culverts were installed on the Kashilijü road, the main connecting road leading to the paddy field of the villagers.
- Intra-village Road: A footpath about 2 kilometres in distance from Kashilijü to Zhethukhe Lejü was made.

2012- 2013

- Land development: A retention wall was built on the way from the state highway to the village.
- *Pucca* drainage: Mishotsü to Tuder. The then SDO came for inspection and forced them to construct *pucca* drainage in this area. It covered a distance of 1 kilometre. This was the only time that came for inspection by the government officials for the MGNREGS work in the village.
- *Pucca* drainage was constructed on the western side of the village which is about one and half kilometres.

2013 – 2014

- Land Development: Ground levelling and digging at *Ora*, *Okhe*, and *Omei Tu* is under construction during the time of fieldwork. It is the place where the three brothers namely; *Ora*, *Okhe*, and *Omei* had erected the monoliths.
- Intra-village Road: A *kutch* connecting road from the centre of the village to Mishotsü, about 5 kilometres was constructed.

DISCUSSION

The villagers were engaged in the construction work under the scheme and were paid wages by the Village Authority. The quality of the works carried out under MGNREGS in Makhel village was substandard. It was found that the Village Authority do not maintain any number of days to be carried out under a project. Once they received the fund for a project, the work would be carried out and completed in a day or two. So, the quality of the work was bad. The development work under the project was carried out so as to extract the fund from the government without knowing the benefits of the development work for themselves. The researcher feel the people do not care about the work that were carried out under the project, the villagers, both the Village Authority and the villagers were more concerned about the money. There is none to teach them about the importance of the projects. It is really very sad to see the ignorance of the village people. The Village Authority do not give the wages according to the number of working days.

They gave the wages according to their wishes and the villagers do not question the Chairman and Secretary of the Village Authority. Under a project, they gave the wages only once in lump sum. In the year 2011, the Makhel Village Authority bought corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheets with the MGNREGS fund and gave three bundles each to every household in the village. The plan was to let every family in the village to have their own house. The villagers informed that the Village Authority do not give the wages on time. When the villagers were questioned as to why they do not approach the higher bodies at Tadubi or Senapati, they expressed their ignorance about how to go about it. On the other hand, the Village Authority members defended themselves by saying that they distribute the wages whenever they receive it which is on an irregular basis. The villagers suspect that the fund coming from the government is more than what the Village Authority gave them but they never question how much money they received from the government. They seem to have reconciled with the state of affairs.

Conclusion

Overall MGNREGS is being successfully implementing in the district and Makhel village. As Bardhan (2002: 185) writes that “in a world of rampant ethnic conflicts and separatist movements, decentralization is regarded as a way of diffusing social and political tensions and ensuring local cultural and political autonomy”. The same situation is seen in Manipur and with the decentralization policy of the government and the active participation of the local people has brought about the successful implementation of MGNREGS in Makhel village. It has greatly benefited the people. Yet, the quality of work carried out under the project was substandard and the grass root level political institution shows lack of accountability and transparency system. As Patel rightly said ‘the problem is not merely one of development of rural areas but of the development of rural communities – to dispel ignorance and poverty and create self-reliant and self-sustaining healthy modern little communities’ (2010: 14), thus awareness programmes through workshops and seminar needs to be carried out to educate the people both the local leaders and the common people otherwise the economic and political decentralization policy of the Indian Government will not bring much difference in the process of development.

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