

AWARENESS, ENTITLEMENTS AND PARTICIPATION OF SOCIALLY BACKWARD COMMUNITIES IN MGNREGA IN J&K

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Abstract-The study was undertaken in four blocks in two districts of J&K viz. Poonch in Jammu division and Kupwara in Kashmir division. The study is an attempt to investigate the participation of socially backward communities such as SCs, STs and women in various works undertaken in MGNREGA. The study employed descriptive methodology in that both quantitative and qualitative data was utilized for arriving at the findings. The study observed that the participation of socially backward communities has drastically gone down over the years. The factors which contributed to this bad trend are reduction in budget allocation, bad implementation and a complete failure of implementing machinery to make socially backward communities aware about various entitlements and rights enshrined in the MGNREGA Act. The problem also lies in lack of social audit invariably in all the four blocks of the present study

Key Words: MGNREGA, SC, ST, Women, Implementation

Introduction

The enactment of MGNREGA (2005-06), a flagship rural development programme of Govt. of India, is a rights based approach to rural development which was missing in previous rural development schemes (Anand c, 2014). It is aimed at providing livelihood security in rural India by providing work on demand to the rural households to do unskilled work for a period of 100 days at the prevailing minimum wage rate in the states (MGNREGA Act, 2005). The focus of MGNREGA is on creating sustainable rural livelihood through regeneration of the natural resource base by creation of durable assets, enhancing productivity and strengthening rural governance through decentralized planning & built in system of accountability in the form of social audits (MGNREGA Act, 2005).

The MGNREGA ranks among the most powerful policy interventions for the socio-economic upliftment of rural India. The MGNREGA has three distinct goals including protective, preventive and promotive. It protects the rural poor from vulnerabilities by providing them demand based employment. It prevents risks associated with agricultural investment and forced migration of the rural poor. It brings in buoyancy in rural economy via increased consumption demand (Mathur, 2007).

The MGNREGA provides basis for permanent social security system and even acts as an instrument for planned and equitable rural development. It also focuses on raising the productivity of agriculture by creating durable assets. To ensure rights and entitlements of workers under MGNREGA, an exclusive National Rural Employment Guarantee Fund has been set up for implementation of the programme. The Act has a systematic approach for identification and execution of works and payment of wages. It also has the provision for transparency and accountability of implementing agencies. The direct outcome of this provision is conduct of social audits by the Gram Sabhas (GSs) which have been mandated not only by Right to Information (RTI) Act but also the MGNREGA Act 2005-06.

The J&K state has extended the benefits of the central act to the rural areas in the state in a phased manner by framing its own policy known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). This was done to overcome the constitutional limitations as the central MGNREGA is not applicable to the state. Therefore, the present study uses the acronym MGNREGS instead of MGNREGA. The performance of MGNREGS has been dismal as can be seen from its physical and financial performance over a period of time. The major problems are under utilization of budgetary resources, poor execution of works, employment rate has been declining, poor rate of average man-days generated etc. All of these problems point towards one major fact which is poor implementation of the scheme at national level. The budget outlay for FY 2013-14 was Rs 33,000 crore and the expenditure for the same year has been Rs 24,848 crore. Therefore, the problem is that a substantial proportion of budget outlay for the scheme has remained unspent in almost every year. This reflects the inefficiency in making use of the budget outlay in a stipulated time, thereby defeating the very purpose of this largest workfare scheme in the world. The man-days generated reveals that in 2014-15 only 40 Average-Man Days were generated which is starkly lower than that of 54 Average-Man Days generated in 2009-10. These statistics regarding Man-days generated in MGNREGS for the reference period reflect that the guaranteed 100 days target has never been achieved. This reveals the poor management and implementation of the scheme at national level. In FY 2013-14, a mammoth 111.6 lakh works were selected for execution out of which just 11.17 lakh got completed, a staggering deficit of 100 lakh. This yet again reflects on the poor management and execution skills of the implementing agencies at all levels.

Objectives

- i) To study the awareness of target population about various entitlements in MGNREGA scheme
- ii) To study the participation of socially backward communities such as SC, ST and women in MGNREGA.

Research Methodology

A **Multi-Stage Random Sampling Design** has been adopted in the study to generate a representative sample for data collection and hypotheses testing. In the **First stage**, two districts (Kupwara and Poonch) of J&K State were selected from the Phase-I MGNREGS districts on the basis of socio-economic profile. These two districts are among the poorest districts in J&K state. Poonch district is the poorest district in Jammu division with 33.67% & Kupwara is the poorest district in Kashmir division with 32.55% BPL population (*JK BPL Survey, 2008*). Besides, Poonch has an average population per branch of 14000 people making it the most backward district on financial inclusion followed by Kupwara (*JK Economic Survey, 2014*). On the basis of average land holding size of households; Poonch has an average land holding size of 0.88 hectares while Kupwara has an average land holding size of 0.46 hectares which is lower than the state average land holding size of 0.67 Hectare (Agricultural Census 2010-11).

Literature Review

Babu et.al (2010) tested the Impact of MGNREGP on scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Studies conducted in eight states, such as Tripura, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to highlight issues related to MGNREGS and scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) in each of the States. The studies also elaborated the issues of MGNREGS implementation; for example, awareness levels among beneficiaries, etc.

Hyderabad Karnataka Centre for Advanced learning (2010) documented 'Scientific Field Appraisal Study on NREGA in Bidar District of Karnataka'. The study looks at the different aspects of the programme implementation in a scientific and systematic way. The study notes that through the implementation of MGNREGS, the GP is able to position itself as the benefactor of the poor and the downtrodden. The works which have been carried out under the MGNREGS resulted in the increase of the ground water (increase is reported to be as high as 30–40 per cent). It also states that MGNREGS works on private lands belonging to different communities including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have helped in consolidating their efforts towards undertaking various land developmental works.

STEM (2011) conducted a study on "Impact Assessment of NREGA and Evaluation of System and Process in the State of Karnataka". The study was carried out in five districts of the state and it was observed that there is a lack of sufficient awareness among villagers. The study has also highlighted the dearth of a proper publicity and awareness mechanism in the state which has resulted in the poor targeting and participation of poor rural households.

Shylashri, et al. (2011) examined the relationship between processing information on, gaining access to and the delivery of India's national rural employment guarantee scheme (MGNREGS) in three states. The study has observed that the link between information, access and delivery of the scheme is not straightforward. However, researchers suggest that information can increase the propensity for the programme to be accessed by those who are not its primary target population and lack of information decreases the ability of the citizens particularly the poorest of the poor to benefit from the scheme.

Das et al. (2012) studied the awareness about MGNREGS; an ambitious scheme targeting the rural population of India. The study has observed a general lack of awareness about the basic guidelines and legal entitlements among the intended beneficiaries which hampers the successful implementation of the scheme.

Borah, D (2016) examined the awareness of tribal women folk regarding various provisions of MGNREGA in Longjap Gram Panchayat in Nagaon district of Assam. Based on survey data from 100 tribal women regarding awareness about various entitlements in the scheme. It was observed in the study that awareness on some of the important provisions in the scheme was lacking which could hamper the effective implementation of the scheme.

Dheeraja and Rao (2010) in their study on 'Changing Gender Relations: A Study of MGNREGS across Different States' presented the impact of MGNREGS on gender relations in 102 districts in 27 States. The study found that gender relations in favour of women increased in the post-MGNREGS period. Self-esteem, self-image and confidence levels of women improved through their participation under MGNREGS. SHGs contributed to the changes in gender relations among the members and MGNREGS consolidated these changes. Gender Relation Index (GRI) consisting of social, economic and political dimensions at both household and community levels increased for women after implementation of MGNREGS.

Holmes et al. (2010) published an 'An Opportunity for Change? Gender Analysis of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act'. The study presents evidence from qualitative and quantitative research carried out in Madhya Pradesh. It assesses the extent to which MGNREGS integrates a gender sensitive approach to public works programmes to support the inclusion of women in poverty reduction and growth processes. The findings suggest that women's employment in MGNREGS 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, MGNREGS employment has had no impact on household relationships. Though the scheme increases employment and wages for women, a closer look at the number of days of work provided and the actual provision of wages suggests a more unequal picture. The current design of MGNREGS, though it has taken different gender sensitive approaches, is not comprehensive in addressing the different ways in which women experience poverty and vulnerability. As a result, its impact has been mixed with gaps in gender sensitive design that is exacerbated by poor implementation.

Sudarshan (2011) conducted a study on participation level of women in MGNREGS in Himachal, Kerala and Rajasthan. He observed that MGNREGS has succeeded in bringing together large number of women folk into the paid works. His studies also explored some reasons regarding the varied participation of women folk in MGNREGS works across & within the states & suggested some improvement measures that could maximise impact.

Vaidya and Singh (2011) studied performance of MGNREGS in five districts of Himachal Pradesh. They suggested that out-migration was mainly the result of higher wages prevailing in the nearby towns and also added that MGNREGS did enhanced food security, provided protection against extreme poverty, helped to reduce distress migration and indebtedness and gave greater

economic independence and purchasing power to women. They also stated that good quality assets were created under MGNREGS.

Chandrashekar and Ghosh (2011) studied 'Public Works and Wages in Rural India', This study is based on an analysis of the NSSO's 64th Round data that showed that real wages, specifically for women increased in the rural areas after implementation of the scheme. Casual wages in agriculture remained constant compared with 2004-05. Labour costs account for less than half and usually around one-third of total agricultural costs. MGNREGS has had positive effects on women workers in rural labour markets. It has caused gender gaps to come down.

Pani and Iyer (2011) evaluated the effectiveness of the processes of implementation of the MGNREGS in Karnataka. They mainly focussed on issues related to the processes involved in seeking of work, in providing of work, the impact of work for the rural poor & their economy, and the various processes involved in enabling and monitoring of the programme.

Afridi et al, (2012) studied the impact of NREGA on 'children's educational outcomes via female labour force participation'. It is found that female empowerment through opportunities for female labour participation in NREGA, improved the educational outcomes of children

Kumar (2013) studied the Empowerment of Rural People through MGNREGS with Special Emphasis to Women in Morigaon, Assam. The paper tries to examine the level of empowerment (using various indicators), especially of women through their participation in MGNREGS activities in Morigaon district of Assam after it is launched in 2006. The analysis is made on the basis of primary data collected from 600 respondents (300 participants and 300 non-participants) on various socioeconomic characteristics and their economic, social and political impacts on them.

Rashmi T (2013) studied the impact of MGNREGS on women participation; challenges and benefits. The study has concluded that there has been a steady growth in women's participation in the scheme but the participation level rates are varied across states in India. The scheme has enabled women to become financially stable and has encouraged women to engage actively in the works undertaken under MGNREGS.

Chelladurai (2014) opined that MGNREGA is one of the most popular wage employment programmes among women. The overall impact of MGNREGA on women's lives was quite positive in many ways, whether it was by enhancing their economic independence and self-confidence, contributing to food security, helping to reduce distress migration etc. The researcher has observed that the role of MGNREGA as a tool of women's empowerment deserves much more attention than it had received so far.

Ahangar (2014) reviewed that in MGNREGS scheme women have benefited most as a worker, than as a community. Women have been observed to take work under MGNREGS as freedom from their routine and tiresome family activities. The study also found that equal wages for men and women helped to reduce the gender inequality to some extent.

Borah (2014) examined the impact of MGNREGA on women empowerment and identified the barriers in the implementation of the scheme. The study has observed significant benefits for women in MGNREGA including income gains, independence, self-confidence and more say in family decision making.

Desai et al. (2015) examined the impact of employment scheme on women workers. It was observed that MGNREGA offers equal wages to men and women workers. The women's employment in the scheme is high and for nearly half the women participants the programme provides the first opportunity to earn cash income. The study has further observed through panel data, very high participation of poor and economically & socially vulnerable groups such as landless labourers, marginal farmers, adivasis, SCs, STs, OBCs & women. The programme according to study has reduced poverty by 32% and has prevented 14 million people from falling into poverty.

R Manjula & Rajasekhar D (2015) carried out a research study on the participation of scheduled caste households (SC HHs) in MGNREGS in Karnataka, with the help of both primary & secondary data. The demand for MGNREGS work and participation of SC households was found to be high in districts where the incidence of SC population was high. However, the number of days of employment obtained by SC households was relatively low which indicates discrimination in work allocation.

Das, U (2015) studied the rationing and targeting in Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The study has analysed the nationally representative data for 2009-2010 and 2012-13. The study observed that the poorer households in terms of monthly consumption expenditure have lesser probability of getting work in both sample periods. Poorer households are also found to be significantly associated with lower days of work in 2009-2010 compared to the relatively better-off ones. The findings of the study emphasises on the need to reduce rationing and generate awareness on the basic entitlements of the scheme along with increased accountability and vigilance for better targeting.

Mani (2016) has summarised the evidence that shows that MGNREGA has most positively impacted the lives of women in India. A review of panel data surveys (YLPS & IHDS), according to author reveals that the programme benefitted both women and their children. Second, several studies using national-level repeated cross-sectional data find almost no impact on women's outcomes and/or children's outcomes. Third, the panel surveys that track children and women have much richer data on children's human capital, child labour, and women's outcomes (labour force participation, wages, decision-making, ownership of bank accounts & others).

Data Analysis & Conclusion

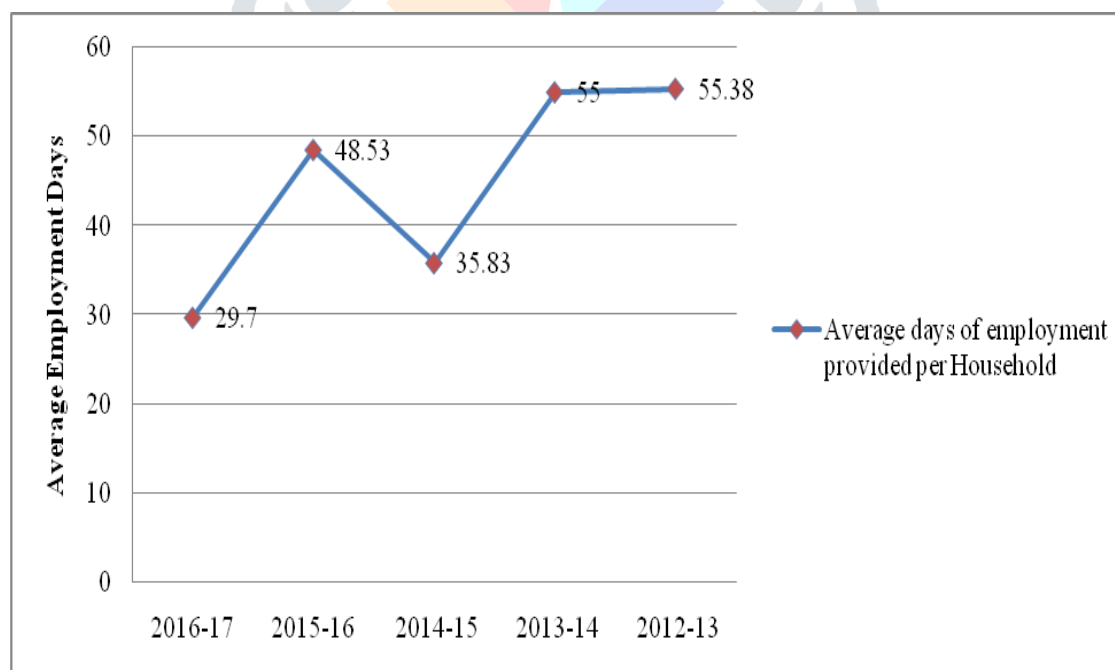
The person days generated is a good indicator of the performance of the scheme. The data in table 1 shows that the total person days generated for 2012-13 is 20.32 lakh which is down to 6.97 lakh in 2014-15. The interesting data point in table 1 is the percentage of women person days to total person days is 29.37% person days, which is good considering the cultural factors of the region. The figure 1 depicts that the average person days generated for 2012-13 is 55.38 which has gone down to 48.53 in 2015-16 which is way below than the MGNREGA Act 2005-06 mandated guaranteed 100 days of unskilled employment to rural households in a year. The poor implementation of the scheme is also reflected by the small value of total No of HHs completed

100 Days of wage employment. The data for this variable is only 2,388 households in 2015-16 against 0.44 lakh households worked for the same period.

Table 1: Performance of MGNREGS By Person Days Generated in District Kupwara

Person Days Generated	FY 2016-17	FY 2015-16	FY 2014-15	FY 2013-14	FY 2012-13
Persondays Generated so far [In Lakhs]	2.49	21.12	6.97	26.94	20.32
SC Persondays % as of total Persondays	0.31	0.14	0.1	0.11	0.03
ST Persondays % as of total Persondays	3.66	2.78	2.92	3.04	0.98
Women Persondays out of Total (%)	29.37	27.03	26.42	24.27	15.23
Average days of employment provided per Household	29.7	48.53	35.83	55	55.38
Total No of HHs completed 100 Days of Wage Employment	70	2,388	461	4,605	2,829
Total Households Worked [In Lakhs]	0.08	0.44	0.19	0.49	0.37
Total Individuals Worked [In Lakhs]	0.14	0.75	0.31	0.8	0.52
Differently abled persons worked	20	57	14	73	27

Figure 1: Average Days of Employment in Kupwara Under MGNREGS



The execution of scheme is dismal across the state of J&K and sample block Trehgam is no exception to that. In terms of physical performance of MGNREGS the gap between the works taken up for execution and works completed is widening. In FY 2013-14, a total of 1669 works were taken up for execution out of which only 5 works were completed and in FY 2015-16, 753 works were taken up for execution only 550 were completed. Therefore, there is an ample evidence to suggest that the scheme is poorly implemented in the block and the same holds true for other sample districts and blocks as has been analyzed in previous sections.

Table 2: Performance of MGNREGS in Block Trehgam of District Kupwara

Performance	FY 2016-17	FY 2015-16	FY 2014-15	FY 2013-14	FY 2012-13
Person-days Generated(PDG)					
Total PDG	785	60,121	20,412	3,38,556	1,71,530
SC PDG % of Total PDG	0	0	0	0	0
ST PDG % of Total PDG	0	0	0	1.13	0.87
Women PDG Out of Total (%)	39.24	37.82	37.74	25.37	5.8
Avg. Days of Employment Per HH	31.4	54.51	41.24	63.06	68.31
Physical Performance					
Total No. of Works Takenup (New+Spill Over)	204	753	651	1,669	606
Number of Completed Works	4	550	75	5	18
% of Expenditure on Agriculture & Agriculture Allied Works	60.97	68.05	54.87	52.91	46.6
Financial Performance					
Total Exp (Rs. in Lakhs.)	83.15	232.01	85.52	665	690.16
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	30.89	98.3	32.32	368.52	288
Liability(Wages) (Lakhs.)	1.29	6.59	4.75	30.68	0.02
% Payments within 15 days	0	1.35	0	16.23	4.01

Source: www.nrega.nic.in, accessed on 16/12/2016.

HH: Household

The performance of MGNREGS in block Poonch of sample district Poonch is depicted in table 3. The total Person-days generated (PDG) in FY 2012-13 was 4, 86,977 which has declined to 1,62,260 PDG in FY 2015-16. The women's share in total PDG in FY 2015-16 was 34.07% which is up from 18.6% in FY 2012-13. Therefore, the performance of the block on women's work participation parameter is fairly to the satisfaction of the Act guidelines.

The physical performance of the scheme is reflected in total works completed in FY 201-16 is 1,133 out of total 1,677 works taken up for execution for the same period. The budget allocation of funds on agriculture and allied activities has gone down from over 72% in FY 2012-13 to 53.94% in FY 2015-16 which partially explains the poor works completion in sample districts and blocks.

Table 3: Performance of MGNREGS in Block Poonch of District Poonch

Performance	FY 2016-17	FY 2015-16	FY 2014-15	FY 2013-14	FY 2012-13
Person-days Generated(PDG)					
Total PDG	16,078	1,62,260	93,606	3,91,520	4,86,977
SC PDG % of Total PDG	0	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.07
ST PDG % of Total PDG	49.12	45.22	42.95	44.56	46.74
Women PDG Out of Total (%)	31.11	34.07	35.61	29.36	18.6
Avg. Days of Employment Per HH	28.16	48.76	29.39	53	65.28
Physical Performance					
Total No. of Works Takenup	689	1,677	1,314	1,921	2,566
Number of Completed Works	102	1,133	59	443	2,540
% of Expenditure on Agriculture & Allied Works	56.55	53.94	65.39	76.28	72.71
Financial Performance					
Total Exp. (Lakhs.)	247.11	385.43	359.91	980.72	817.45
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	156.43	133.66	184.97	617.22	392.3
Liability(Wages) (Lakhs)	18.77	53.61	2.19	0.74	0.26
% Payments Generated within 15 days	8.74	3.36	29.02	7.12	60.48

Source: www.nrega.nic.in, accessed on 17/12/2016.

HH: Household

The total Person days generated in sample block Surankote in FY 2012-13 is 4, 86,424 which has declined to 2,24,217 in FY 2015-16. The percentage of women in work participation has steadily declined from 28.22% to 23.76% in FY 2015-16. The average days of wage employment provided to rural households in Surankote is 55.47 days which is up from 36.2 average days in FY 2014-15. The proportion of wage employment to social minorities such as ST's is modest given the population of ST's in block Surankote is around 50% in 2011-12.

The ratio between works taken up and works completed is considerable as can be seen from the table 4. The works taken up for execution in FY 2015-16 is 2,366 out of which only 1,286 have been completed. The possible reasons for this growing work incompletion rate are many such as declining allocation of funds to labour intensive works in agriculture and allied activities as evident from the relevant data in the table 4.2. The inefficiency and poor implementation of the scheme is also reflected in lower participation of women in work, delay in wage payment and growing liabilities on wage side due to non disbursement of wages on time and low wages compared to prevailing market wage rates.

Table 4: Performance of MGNREGS in Block Surankote of District Poonch

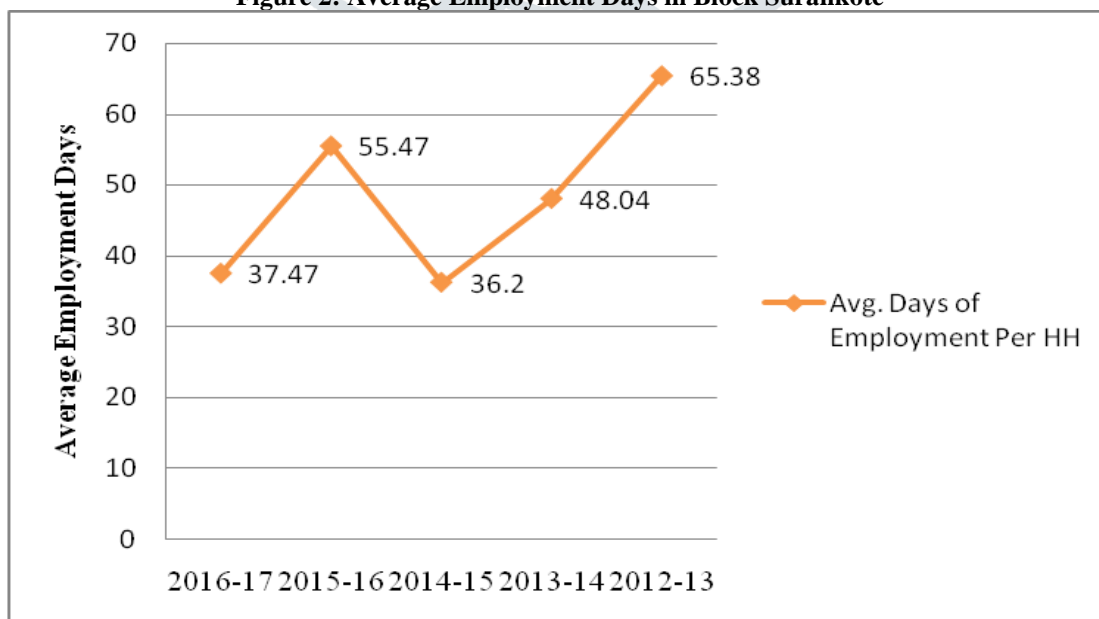
Performance	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14	2012-13
Person-days Generated(PDG)					
Total PDG	28,592	2,24,217	1,15,576	3,56,762	4,86,424
SC PDG % of Total PDG	0	0.01	0.01	0	0
ST PDG % of Total PDG	34.12	36.29	34.35	35.56	43.81
Women PDG Out of Total (%)	23.09	23.76	28.22	19.14	11.91
Avg. Days of Employment Per HH	37.47	55.47	36.2	48.04	65.38
Physical Performance					
Total No. of Works Takenup	1,305	2,366	2,100	3,183	3,399
Number of Completed Works	259	1,286	102	101	1,390
% of Expenditure on Agriculture & Agriculture Allied Works	29.75	16.2	59.97	58.34	38.06
Financial Performance					
Total Exp (Rs. in Lakhs.)	236.19	357.05	255.9	828.33	932.79
Wages (Rs. In Lakhs)	167.44	195.14	126.66	467.44	410.43
Liability (Wages) (Rs. in Lakhs.)	48.49	150.66	59.72	21.73	0

Source: www.nrega.nic.in, accessed on 17/12/2016.

HH: Household

The average employment or participation of people in MGNREGA is presented in figure 2. It can be observed that the average employment days has gone down from 65.38 person days in FY 2012-13 to 37.47 person days in FY 2016-17, which is clearly a major failure of the implementation of the scheme in Surankote block.

Figure 2: Average Employment Days in Block Surankote



Conclusion

The present study has endeavored to examine the operational performance of the scheme in four blocks of two districts in J&K state. The study has utilized both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the performance of the scheme on employment, income, income consumption pattern, migration, access to credit, asset perception, financial inclusion, awareness on entitlements and other implementation related issues.

The findings and observations from primary and secondary data indicates that various positive achievements in the scheme have been made such as on financial inclusion, inclusion of social and backward communities, women, utilization of funds and creation of durable assets. However, much is still to be desired as the full potential of MGNREGS in transforming rural economic landscape is yet to be realized. The real transformation can only happen in the rural sector when rural population is fully empowered through better and complete information about various rights and entitlements in the scheme, delivering on the expectations of socially and economically weaker sections of the rural communities, ensuring better transparency and accountability in the implementation of the scheme.

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