

MNREGA: An Effective Tool to Reduce Migration from Bihar

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to analyse the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (MNREGA) that was launched in the year 2005 in India as a social security measure to provide employment to the people in rural India at their native place and curb migration to other places with reference to its effect upon migration of laborers in Bihar. The Act guarantees 100 days of employment to all households. MNREGA is meant to provide employment to reduce poverty in rural areas at the same time build rural infrastructure that is a prime need of the hour. It is an instrument for inclusive growth in rural India by providing social protection, livelihood security and democratic governance. The study is conducted on the backward and least privileged class of Dalits and Pasmada Muslims in the districts of Bihar to see the effect of MNREGA in reducing the migration from the state.

Keywords: MNREGA, migration, poverty, unemployment, job cards, households (HHs)

Introduction

Rural India is caught in a vicious poverty cycle. Majority of the people are dependent on agriculture which depends upon uncertain monsoons. Rural India suffers from the deficiency of basic infrastructure in villages due to which rural population suffers from the lack of market accessibility for their produce. They are forced to sell their products to middlemen at lower prices. There is also a lack of sustainable income and employment opportunities for a major section of population. Limited livelihood opportunities and stagnation in agriculture has aggravated the rural poverty levels. Absence of infrastructure is one of the major reasons that have held back the growth of agriculture sector in India.

Decline in the growth of agricultural productivity, rising unemployment in the economy, farmers committing suicide in different parts of the country and a high degree of migration from rural to urban areas were the main socio-economic causes for the introduction of **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** (MNREGA), with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people and development of infrastructure in the rural sector of the economy. It was introduced by the government of India as an Indian job guarantee scheme by legislation on August 25, 2005. The law was initially called the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) but was renamed on 2 October 2009. It came into force in 200 selected (backward) districts of the country on February 2, 2006, and was extended to 130 more districts from April 1, 2007 onwards.

It is a right-based framework and it is a law made by the Government of India to reduce the inequality of income and regional disparity prevailing in the country. The scheme provides a legal guarantee to adult members of any rural household willing to do unskilled manual public work for 100 days of employment in every financial year such as building roads, improving water supply and other works that are necessary to improve the village infrastructure. If an applicant is not provided employment within 15 days he / she shall be entitled for unemployment allowance and work within 5 kilometers of his village otherwise an extra 10% of the wages are paid to meet the extra travelling expenses.

Objective of the Study

- to find out that MNREGA has an effect on decreasing rural urban Migration in the state of Bihar
- to find out that MNREGA is an effective tool in the elimination of poverty and unemployment

Hypothesis of the Study

- Squeezing agriculture, large scale industrial urbanization, flow of foreign capital to urban centers and regional imbalances has increased migration from rural to urban areas.
- MNREGA has been successful in reducing poverty and migration from Bihar

Research Methodology

The methodology of the study included selection of five Panchayats in four districts of Patna, Gaya, West Champaran and Saharsa as samples in the state of Bihar. The area of study includes the typically backward region of Bihar with high migration rate.

This paper looks at the effects of MNREGA in increasing job opportunities in rural areas at the same time reducing migration to other places. For this, a detailed survey at five Panchayat in four districts of Bihar was undertaken to highlight the impact of MNREGA. Survey included interview with 1430 people. The survey recorded the level of migration among the respondents after the implementation of MNREGA in Bihar. During field survey, the conditions of Dalits and Pasmada Muslims of the same districts and the same Panchayats were analysed, especially with reference to migration. Some Statistical tools such as average, graphical representation will be used for the purpose of analysis of data .

Migration

Migration is the movement of people across a specified boundary for the purpose of establishing a new or semi-permanent residence. People migrate to other places due to lack of employment opportunities at their native place. Non availability of work and non-relevance of government programs, in a particular locality, is also responsible for migration from that region. Sometimes people migrate for their personal growth and better prospects also.

Migration in Bihar

Migration from the state has a long history dating back to the 19th century, when a large number of people migrated overseas (mainly as indentured labour to British Colonies) as well as to other parts of the country, for example, Mauritius is formed by Biharis.

Origin of current migration took place in early sixties when Green Revolution took place in Punjab and there was a dearth of agricultural labour. People migrated from Bihar to Punjab in search of employment opportunities and then gradually to other parts of the country as there were limited opportunities in Bihar.

The incidence of out-migration from rural Bihar is probably greater than anywhere else in India. Such circumstances were created in the state that sending a family member out of the state to earn livelihood was the only way of staying alive. Occurrence of regular flood and drought, closure of industries as well as law and order situation in the state added to the migration of people from the state.

During the period of 20 years (1981-82 and 1999-2000) the proportion of migrants approximately doubled and the nature of migration also changed from short-term to long-term. In the beginning migration took place only during harvesting season for few months but gradually it increased to a number of years. Migration of workers is fairly distributed to all castes and classes and now upper caste and Muslims report more long term migration.

Migration in Bihar is predominantly out- of-state as 90% of the migrants go out of the state and 5% migrate within the state. 30% of the migrants migrate for 3 months, 40% for 3-6 months and only 11% for the entire year.

Trend of Migration

Migration in Bihar is mostly seasonal and undertaken purely to meet the basic financial necessities during the lean season of the month wherein one member from the household migrates to earn for the entire family during the season. In fact, seasonal migration dominates the migration trends in Bihar.

Positive impact of Migration

Migration has given an opportunity to rural population to earn money and livelihood which remains unavailable at their native place.

Moreover, it has freed them from the clutches of local moneylenders who charge interest at exorbitant rates. Sometimes it is 100% of the principle amount which force them to work as bonded labours. Further, they do not need to depend on local money lenders any more to meet their financial needs as they are able to earn good amount.

Migration has improved their purchasing power also and they are able to meet the consumption needs of their household which would have starved if they have not migrated.

In addition to the above, they have also been able to save some amount to invest in land, agriculture, housing and education for their children.

Negative impact of Migration

Migration may have serious consequences too:

Bihar is sitting on the time bomb of AIDS epidemic. Bihar state HIV rate is .53% as compared to the National rate of .9 % (*according to survey conducted by Bihar Aids Control Society in 2005*). Situation in Bihar is very alarming. HIV infections are more prevalent in migrating population than non migrating population. Bihar has a huge migrant population. In Northern Bihar 89% of the migrants are reported to be HIV positive. (*Population control- UNDP report*). When they return home they infect their wives also.

When the whole family migrates then women and children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation at their destination. They also have to overwork due to hard living and working conditions. Children miss their schools, food and shelter becomes very costly affair.

They are looked down by the local people at their destination. They are treated as outsiders and with suspicion. They often have to suffer the anger of local people also and at the same time treated as illegal residents and harassed by the police also.

There are many instances of Bihari migrants exploited by their employers at various places. Many times they are delayed in payments, often underpaid and sometimes forced to work as bonded labour without any payment.

If we look into the migration trends among the people in Bihar then we would find that there has been a decline in migration since the advent of MNREGA, though this decline is not very substantial.

MNREGA in Bihar

High degree of unemployment in the state is the major factor for migration of workers in Bihar. Workers, irrespective of their caste and religion are migrating to other states in search of job opportunities and sometimes better avenues at some other place.

MNREGA was implemented in first phase in Bihar in the year 2006 as it is one of the most backward states in the country. 90% of the population of Bihar lives in rural areas. There is a high incidence of poverty in the villages. Agricultural development is very low and a large proportion of the population depends upon agriculture and allied sectors for livelihood.

As such, Implementation of MNREGA becomes very important for a developing state like Bihar. In the beginning, implementation of the scheme was not much encouraging in the state Inefficiency, leakages, and poor and inefficient utilization of development funds and resources were the major hurdles in the state but in recent few years, with the initiative of the State Government, the situation has improved to a great extent.

Benefits of MNREGA in Bihar

- MNREGA scheme and the concept of minimum wages shall increased the bargaining power of the workers. They may not be exploited by the mediators who take them to severe working conditions in other places at lower wages.
- It may also increase the wages of agricultural labor during harvesting season as they can work in an organized way and bargain with the land owners to increase their wages.
- MNREGA shall help the workers to form their own social groups and work in a collective manner. This may further help them to strengthen their bargaining power.

- MNREGA may prove to be an effective tool in reducing migration of the workers from their native place not only in Bihar but all over the country to a great extent.
- It may give an opportunity to the workers to earn at their native place at the same time live happily with their family.
- Most importantly, MNREGA may bring infrastructural development in the rural areas. One cannot imagine a developed India without its developed villages.

Though the scheme looks very attractive and can bring a massive change in the rural economy of the country if properly implemented but the problem lies in its implementation.

Field Work Analysis

There is a lack of official data on migration. Latest report on migration in Bihar is not is not made available either by census 2011 or Bihar Government. However, an independent survey was conducted by the *Xavier Institute of Social Research Patna* on migration of Dalits in Bihar with a sample size of 1430 respondents across 5 Panchayat of Baank, Bumer, Suar Marwa, Uttari Patjirwa and Utesara in 4 districts of Patna, Gaya, West Champaran and Saharsa in Bihar.

Table 1 shows the no. of persons laborer in the family listed in MNREGA

District	Panchayats	No. of laborers	Mean of no. of persons laborer in the family.	Name of the respondents includes in MNREGS	No. of respondents who are not listed in MNREGS.
Patna	Baank	302	2.32	259	43
Patna	Bumer	463	3.02	351	112
Gaya	Suar Marwa	38	2.71	21	17
West Champaran	Uttari Patjirwa	320	1.91	221	99
Saharsa	Utesra	307	2.31	234	73
	Total	1430		1086	344

Source: *Xavier institute of social research, Patna*

Table 1 shows on an average there are two persons in a family (both male and female) who can work as a laborer but MNREGA scheme provides job for only one person per household.

Table 2 Effectiveness of MNREGA in poverty alleviation

Panchayats	No. of labors	Names included in MANREGA	No. of persons with job cards	No of persons with pass book	Arithmetic Mean of days work.	Wages per day
Baank	302	259	240	203	16.1	94
Bumer	463	351	323	181	20.32	99
Suar Marwa	38	21	11	6	9.53	99
Uttari Patjirwa	320	221	209	169	14.93	88
Utesra	307	234	166	151	22.57	91
Total	1430	1086	949	710	16.69	94.2

Source: Xavier institute of social research, Patna

Out of total sample size of 1430 respondents only 1086 people's name were included in MNREGA and 949 people had job cards. Although MNREGA aims to provide 100 days of work but on an average only 16.69 days of work was given to them and wages per day given was only Rs 94.20

Table 3 shows a general view of the people on MNREGA in eliminating poverty and employment

Spatial status	No of people with job card	No of people unaware about MNREGA	MANREGA is a loot, it is for Mukhiya not for us.	No response	Worked for 100 days last year. Yes, can remove poverty	Worked for 1-10 days, can't remove poverty	Worked for 11-20 days, can't remove poverty and unemployment	Grand Total
Non-migrant	353	142	38	27	21	174	167	922
Outside state	263	158	30	17	11	128	133	740
Within state	11	4	0	2	2	8	9	36
Total	627	304	68	46	34	310	309	1698

Source: Xavier institute of social research, Patna

Table 4 shows district wise general view of the people on MNREGA in eliminating poverty and employment

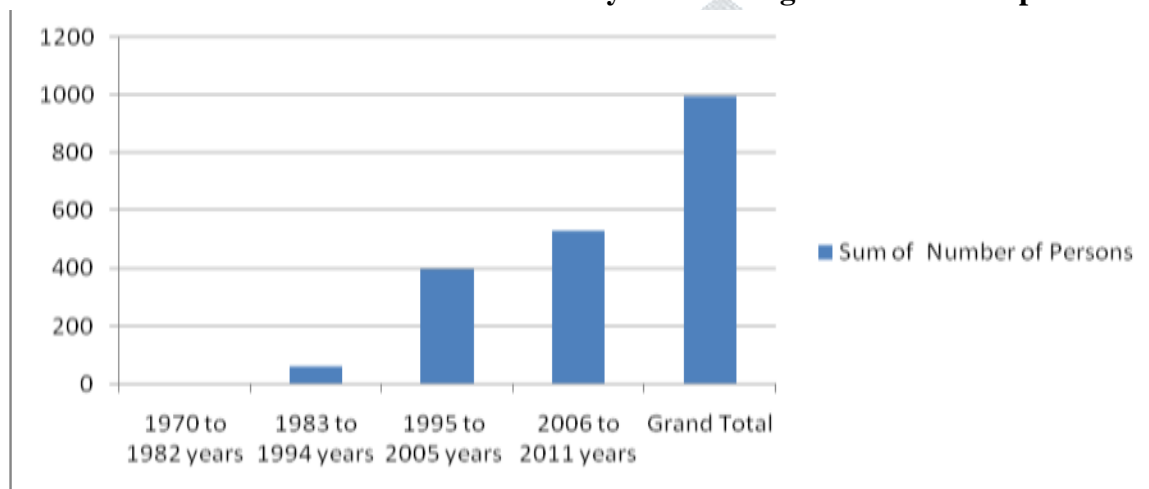
Panchayats	Total	Worked only for 1-10 days, can't remove poverty & unemployment	Worked for 11-20 days, can't remove unemployment	Worked for 21-40 days last year, can remove poverty	MANREGA is a means of loot for Mukhiya	Unaware of MNREGA	No Response
Baank (Patna)	353	101	70	9	30	45	3
Bumer (Patna)	595	98	78	21	8	133	-
Suar Marwa (Gaya)	42	-	-	-	-	-	42
Uttari Patjirwa (W. Champaran)	367	66	61	4	3	89	1
Utesra (Saharsa)	341	10	1	-	3	16	287
Total	1698	275	210	34	44	-	-
% of total	100	16.2	12.37	2	2.59	16.67	19.61

Source: Xavier institute of social research. Patna

It is obvious that participation of non migrant workers would be higher due to their local presence. A new scenario has emerged among migrant workers that they do not depend upon state sponsored schemes for their poverty alleviation due to their changed status.

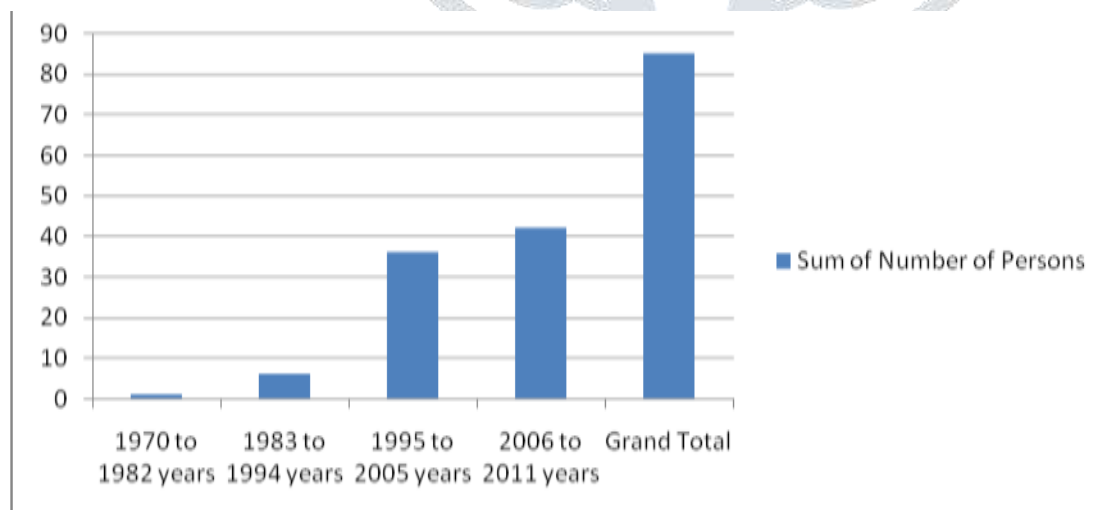
18% of the respondents were unaware of the scheme. 4% of the respondents claimed that MNREGS is a loot; *it is for Mukhiya and not for us*. 2.71% preferred to the category of - no response indicating them in the most negative zone of attitude.

Table 5 shows intensity of Dalit Migration in Time Spans



Source: Xavier institute of social research. Patna

Table 6 shows intensity of Pasmada Muslims Migration in Time Spans



Source: Xavier institute of social research. Patna

Among both Dalits and Pasmada Muslims as they are the most disadvantaged group with highest intensity of migration, the same trend is being observed. The period 2006-11 witnessed 49.41 % migration. The intensity of

migration is higher among the Paasmanda Muslims than the Dalits in Bihar. Paasmanda Muslims witnessed 67.41 % migration witnessing households in comparison to 45% of Dalits. The average number of mean of migrants per households is 0.9555 in comparison to Dalits' 0.642 and Mean of migrated persons of migrated HHs is 1.416 as against the Dalits' 1.404.

The overall picture of Bihar is quite dismal, with slow development of the secondary and tertiary sectors and high dependence on agriculture. Non-farm employment opportunities are also very limited. The disconcerting situation is the poor infrastructure inhibiting development in the state. There is a high level of unemployment in the state.

Ground Realities

MNREGA scheme is not properly implemented in Bihar. Although the State Government is making a lot of efforts in its proper implementation still there are many instances of corruption in the implementation of the scheme.

- The Act has strengthened the role of Gram Panchayat which is supposed to issue job cards to the workers. There are instances of job cards being issued to undeserving and influential people. In some cases, reports have come about payment of bribe to the officials for issue of job cards.
- Wages are supposed to be paid through bank accounts and pass books are supposed to be maintained. Bank accounts of the relatives of mukhiya and influential people are opened easily and Pass books issued.
- The Act provides for the right of minimum wages to the workers but has failed to connect it with the **Minimum Wages Act, 1948**. Recently the Prime Minister of India announced that the Government of India may not be able to provide minimum wages to the workers. At present, minimum wages are Rs 140 per day but workers are paid much lesser amount than this. In some states it is as low as Rs 90 per day.
- The Act also provides for a 100 days of guaranteed work to a household in a year but 100 days of work is not provided to them properly.

Impact of MNREGA on migration in Bihar

MNREGA was introduced with an aim to improve the economic condition of the rural people so that the massive migration from rural to urban areas may be reduced and people shall get employment at their native place. But due to the discrepancies involved in its implementation there is an adverse effect on out-migration in Bihar.

- The Act has strengthened the role of Gram Panchayat to a great extent which is responsible for the issue of job cards and opening of bank accounts of the people on its recommendations. Sometimes it becomes very difficult for common people to get job cards issued and bank accounts opened without influential recommendations or bribe being paid. There is undue delay, in many cases, in the issue of job cards also.
- MNREGA provides for only 100 days of work to the workers and they remain unemployed for the rest of 265 days of the year. Due to this shortcoming MNREGA has failed to reduce migration from villages.
- Job is provided to them at that time when they already have a lot of work at their fields. This makes the job at MNREGA irrelevant to those who prefer to work at their fields. So, the efforts should be made to provide job in off season, i.e. at the time when the labors tend to migrate.
- MNREGA provides for the guarantee of work to only one member of the family and that too only for 100 days in a year. This is a well known fact that both men and women work equally in rural areas. Men work at fields and women help them equally. When work is given to only one member of the family then it is generally women who opt to work and stay at home while men migrate to other places in order to increase the earnings of the family.
- Government has failed to connect the provision of minimum wages with the **Minimum Wages Act**, as such; lesser amounts are paid to the workers in MNREGA. This has reduced the very essence of the scheme. Lesser wages is not acceptable to them when they are earning higher wages somewhere else. The following table shows the average wages earned by the migrant workers under different types of work.

Table 7 shows The Average Earning of a Migrant Worker

Worker at destination in Rs.

Types of Work	Bihar	Jharkhand	Overall
Agricultural work	99	Na	99
Construction work	99	96	98
Factory work	98	100	98
Household work	100	58	86

Public work	150	120	135
Daily wage	96	108	98
Other	105	100	103
Total	99	101	99

Source: UNDP Report (2007 -2008)

The above table shows the average earnings of the workers in different types of work which is around Rs 100 in the year 2007-2008. Since then, the averages wages have gone much above this amount at their destinations (current data is not available). Now the important question is that, if today (in 2010-11) workers are paid the wages which is equal to or below the wages that they earned 4-5 years ago then are they going to accept it? Definitely not.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that MNREGA is an excellent scheme to bring about a transformation in rural India which has not developed to that extent even after so many years of independence. It is perhaps one of the most progressive and interesting bills passed by the Indian parliament in the recent times. This bill has a potential to bring a huge change in rural India. This bill on one hand can reap the rich human resources available in rural India to develop the most essential infrastructural facilities and on the other hand stem the migration of farmers/rural workers to cities.

Gandhiji had dreamt for a developed and prosperous India on the pillars of developed villages of India. He had rightly said that real India lives in villages and we cannot imagine a developed India without its developed villages. Developed villages shall make a developed state of Bihar. As Bihar is the 3rd most populated state in the country and about 40% of the population of Bihar lives below poverty line, one cannot think about a developed Nation without developing the condition of Bihar and its people.

MNREGA has a huge potential to improve the economic condition of the people in rural Bihar in the long term but, as other schemes of the government, it also has certain flaws due to which middlemen has come into illegal nexus with the corrupt Government officials. The only way to overcome corruption is by generating awareness among the people about their rights so that they can question the officials for transparency. RTI (Right to Information Act) has come at the right time and it should become the primary weapon for the people. It is required to implement the scheme with full zeal and enthusiasm on the part of the Government at the Centre, at the State level as well as at the local level.

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