



The impact of NREGA on rural development of Krishnagar II Block in COVID-19 situation, West Bengal (India)

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Abstract:

NREGA has come after approximate 56 years of other rural employment programmes in India. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted on August 23, 2005. This scheme was passed and implemented in September 2005. In October 2, 2009, this scheme was renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (Mohanty 2012: 1). Again, this scheme, 2005, has been replaced by a new legislative framework known as the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025. It has three major objectives: i) To increase the availability and widen the distribution of sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection. ii) To raise the levels of living including higher incomes, more employment opportunities, better education and greater attention to cultural and humanistic values. iii) To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations by freeing them from servitude and dependence not only on other people but also on the forces of ignorance and human misery (Shanthi 2017: 8). This article includes various issues like MGNREGA's work during Covid-19, Employment Provided households of SC, ST and Women during Covid-19, unemployment allowance, employment opportunities, and, impact of MGNREGA on SC, ST, women, and disabled persons during Covid-19 etc. compared with pre-Covid situation in Krishnagar-II block.

Keyword: NREGA, Employment, Education and Development etc.

Introduction:

The research study describes an MGNREGA and socio-economic development in Krishnagar II block based on official and survey data. This chapter has mentioned Krishnagar II block's MGNREGA performance in covid-19 period compared with pre-covid-19 period. MGNREGA, 2005, has been repealed and replaced by a new legislative framework known as the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025. Krishnagar -II block is a community development block. It is under the Krishnagar Sadar subdivision of Nadia district in the Indian state of West Bengal. MGNREGA was implemented on April 1, 2007, in the Krishnagar II CD block of Nadia District. The main objective of this scheme was to provide 100 days of guaranteed unskilled-wage employment and economic development to every rural household. Krishnagar II block has 1 panchayatsamity, 7 Gram Panchayats, 103

Gram Sansads (village councils), 45 mouzas, and 44 inhabited villages. Dhubulia police station serves this block. The head quarter of this Krishnagar II block is situated in Dhubulia. Seven Gram panchayats of Krishnagar II block are Belpukur, Dhubulia I, Dhubulia II, Noapara-I, Noapara-II, Sadhanpara-I, and Sadhanpara-II. In Krishnagar II block, MGNREGA focused on various activities like public works relating to natural resources management (water conservation, watershed management, drought proofing (including a forestation/tree plantation), clearing traditional water bodies, and land development), Individual assets for vulnerable sections relating works productivity of lands, waste lands, livelihoods, construction of house and promotion of fisheries, livestock, and rural infrastructure (rural sanitation, road connectivity, play fields, restoration, construction of building, food grain storage structures, production of building material required for construction and maintenance etc.). Krishnagar II block is industrially backward and agriculturally dependent. Agriculture is the major occupation of majority of the population in Krishnagar II block. So, economic, industrial, educational, social development of this area is dependent on agricultural production (Savandkar 2016: 77). Due to the lack of employment opportunities in the region, people would have to go through distress migration to urban areas as contract labour. In 2026, the MGNREGA completed 20 years of implementation in the Krishnagar II CD block of Nadia district. This scheme has been universalized and operational in all the 7 Gram Panchayats of the Krishnagar II CD block. The scheme has been able to put money in the hands of the poorest in the study block. Now, Krishnagar II block 100 per cent of the MGNREGA wage payment is being paid through the bank or post office accounts. Krishnagar II CD Block is one of the few blocks in the Nadia district to complete the social audit and labour budget planning in all the Gram Panchayats in a timely manner. No contractors or middlemen are permitted to get job cards and MGNREGA work. Hundred per cent of MGNREGA works are implemented by the Gram Panchayat. MGNREGA has been strengthening the Panchayati Raj Institutions through equal work allocations (APO, Krishnagar II Block 2022).

Employment opportunities of MGNREGA during COVID-19 in Krishnagar II Block:

In rural areas, major livelihood activities are irregular, mainly due to seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and allied activities. This leads to a large labour force, especially the marginal labourers in migrants from their village. Many workers migrate to other parts of the country for work purposes. Lack of alternative work and livelihood are the primary causes of migration from rural areas. Most migrant workers are daily-wage earners. They can't live due to the absence of work for extended periods of COVID-19, which makes it difficult to afford the high cost in urban areas. The government of India (GoI) was compelled to resort to a series of curbs and lockdowns due to an uncontrollable rise in COVID-19 to protect against the spread of the novel coronavirus. It shows that millions of informal workers came back to their own villages due to the lockdown in the COVID-19 pandemic situation in 2020. Therefore, millions of workers suffered job losses from the first wave of novel coronavirus disease to the third wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic situation. The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) emerged as a social safety network for distressed rural workers. This is also true in study areas. The Act generated the highest numbers of employment in May 2020 to June 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic in study areas. In the 2020-21 financial year, Krishnagar II block had performed 1418 completed works and 2437 ongoing works. In the same financial year, the study block's employment opportunities for SC, ST, and women households were increased compared to the previous financial year. The no. of SC, ST, and women-employed households of Krishnagar II block were 2500, 128, and 5416, respectively. In 2020-21, the percentage of employment provided HH of study block increased compared to the previous year. This year, the percentage of employment provided HH in the Krishnagar II block was 88.88 per cent. Krishnagar II block provided employment to 11648 households out of 13106 in this year. Next financial year, in 2021-22, again, the percentage of employment provided HH of Krishnagar block became increased. Krishnagar II block employment provided HH became 90.60 per cent. In 2021-22 financial year, Krishnagar II block was able to provide employment opportunities to 2307 SC households, 196 ST households, and 5988 women households. MGNREGA is promoting social inclusion and employment opportunities, reducing

inequalities, and eradicating poverty for migrants or displaced persons in study areas. So, MGNREGA plays a durable role in protecting rural workers and reducing the prevalence of poverty in the study block. So, it is clear that MGNREGA played an important role during the pandemic, protecting the most vulnerable households from a significant loss of income.

Table No.- 4.18

MGNREGA's Completed and On-going Work during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	Completed work	On-going work
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	1748	1583
	2019-2020	1248	1708
During COVID-19	2020-2021	1418	2437
	2021-2022	905	2085

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in November 2022).

From above table, it is clear that both completed as well as on-going work gradually increased in the pandemic situation compared to the pre-COVID-19 period in the Krishnagar II block. In the financial year 2018-19, the total completed works were 1748 and 1583 on-going works. Next financial year, in pre-pandemic 2019-20, the total completed works were only 1248, and on-going works were 1708. In 2020–21 (the COVID-19 pandemic period), again, the total completed works increased by 1418 and 2437 on-going works compared to the previous year. In the financial year 2021-22 in Krishnagar II block, the total completed works became 905 and 2085 on-going works. So, from the above statistics, it was clear that more completed and on-going work by MGNREGA has emerged in the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Table No.- 4.19

Employment Provided HH of SC during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	Employment provided HHs of SC
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	1140
	2019-2020	1188
During COVID-19	2020-2021	2500
	2021-2022	2344

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in December 2021).

From the above table, it is clearly observed that the number of SC-employed HHs under MGNREGA increased from the pre-COVID-19 period to the COVID-19 period. In the 2018-19 financial year, the figures of SC-employed HHs were only 1140. In the next financial year (2019-20), the number of SC-employed HHs became increased and reached 1188. But in the 2020–21 pandemic situation, employment of SC HHs again increased, and it became 2500 HHs. In the 2021-22 financial year, employment of SC HHs was 2344, which is more than the pre-pandemic situation. So, from the above statistics, it is clear that most SC HHs have got MGNREGA work during the COVID-19 pandemic period compared to the pre-COVID situation. There is no doubt that SC HHs are more utilised from MGNREGA work in the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Table No.- 4.20

Employment Provided HH of ST during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	Employment provided HH of ST
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	53
	2019-2020	106

During COVID-19	2020-2021	128
	2021-2022	197

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in December 2021).

The above table indicates the number of ST-employment-provided households under MGNREGA employment from the pre-pandemic year to the pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block. In the pre-pandemic situation of the 2018-19 financial year, no. of ST-employed HHs were 53. In the 2019-20 fiscal year, the number of ST-employed HHs increased (106 HHs) more than the previous fiscal year. However, during the pandemic situation in 2020-21, employment-provided ST-HHs have increased and became 128 HHs. In the 2021-22 fiscal year, again, the number of ST-employed HHs were more increased and reached 197 HHs. So, from above the table, it is clear that most of the ST HH got MGNREGA work during the pandemic period, compared to the pre-Covid-19 situation. Therefore, they (HHs) were more utilised in MGNREGA work during the crisis situation of the pandemic in Krishnagar II block.

Table No.- 4.21

Employment Provided HH of Women during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	Employment provided HH of women
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	2351
	2019-2020	2940
During COVID-19	2020-2021	5416
	2021-2022	6184

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in December 2021).

From the above statistics, it is observed that the number of women employed households under MGNREGA increased from the pre-pandemic year to the pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block. The number of women employments in the preceding fiscal year (2018-19) was only 2351 HHs. The number of women employments in the pre-pandemic fiscal year 2019-20 increased to 2940 HHs. But during the pandemic situation in 2020-21, 5416 women households got employment. It was more than the previous two fiscal years. However, last financial year (2021-22), again, the number of women employed HHs increased to 6184. From the above table, it is clear that most of the women HHs got MGNREGA work during the pandemic period compared to the pre-Covid-19 situation. Therefore, they (women HH) were more utilised from MGNREGA work during the COVID-19 crisis situation in Krishnagar II block.

Table No.- 4.22

Disabled Participations under MGNREGA during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	No. of disabled Individuals
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	16
	2019-2020	17
During COVID-19	2020-2021	22
	2021-2022	25

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in December 2021).

From the above table, it is observed that the number of disabled beneficiaries who have participated in MGNREGA varies in Krishnagar II block from a pre-pandemic situation to a pandemic situation. In the pre-pandemic situation of 2018-19 financial year, the number of disabled beneficiaries was only 16. In 2019-20, the participation of disabled beneficiaries increased than previous year. This year, 17 disabled persons have participated in study block MGNREGA work. But during the pandemic situation from 2020-21 to 2021-22, both financial years, the number of disabled person's participation was increased under MGNREGA activities, and it became 22 and 25 according to the pre-pandemic situation. So, from the above table, it is clear that more disabled people have got MGNREGA work during the pandemic period

than pre-COVID-19 situation. Therefore, they were more utilised from MGNREGA work during the crisis situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Krishnagar II block.

Table No.- 4.23

Employment ProvidedHH Against Demanded during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Periods	Financial Year	No. of employment demanded HHs	No. of employment provided HHs
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	3730	3469
	2019-2020	6638	5711
During COVID-19	2020-2021	13106	11648
	2021-2022	14169	13137

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in October 2021).

The above table shows the number of HHs provided employments against demanded under MGNREGA during the pre-pandemic situation and pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block. In the pre-pandemic fiscal year 2018-19, there were 3469 employment-provided HHs versus 3730 employment-demanded HHs. In 2019-20, Krishnagar II block was able to provide employment to only 5711 rural HHs, against 6638 demanded HHs. During the pandemic situation in 2020-21, the number of employed HHs increased more than in the pre-pandemic situation. This year, Krishnagar II block has given employment to 11648 rural HHs against 13106 demanded HHs. In the pandemic situation 2021-22, again, the number of employment provided households were more increased than all of the previous financial years. However, in 2021-22, this block has given employment to 13137 rural HHs against 14169 demanded rural HHs under MGNREGA. So, from the above statistic, it was observed that employment demanded HHs as well as benefited employment HHs were the highest numbers in the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Table No.- 4.24

Labour Expenditure (In lakhs) during COVID-19 in Krishnagar-II Block.

Period	Financial Year	Labour expenditure (In lakhs)
Pre-COVID-19 situation	2018-2019	348.11
	2019-2020	412.90
During COVID-19	2020-2021	668.91
	2021-2022	689.40

(Source: Annual report, collected from Krishnagar-II Block Office in October 2021).

From the above table it has been shows how MGNREGA funds were disbursed for labour expenditure purposes during pre-COVID-19 period and COVID-19 period. It is also observed that a huge amount of MGNREGA funds are disbursed for labour purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block. As in the pre-Covid-19 situation, from 2018-19 to 2019-20, labour expenditure was 348.11 lakhs and 412.90 lakhs, respectively. In two financial years in the pandemic situation, the expenditure of MGNREGA's labourers became more increased by 600.35 lakhs and 658.22 lakhs in 2020-21 and 2021-22, respectively. From this table, it's clear that most of the money utilised for labour wages in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. So many labourers were utilised under MGNREGA work during the pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block. As many workers were participated in MGNREGA work during the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Krishnagar II block than others.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that MGNREGA is one of the largest revolutionary demand-driven, people-centered development programme implemented in rural areas. It is very proud that MGNREGA has provided a source of additional income to families without making any wage discrimination between man and women. Therefore, like man, the study block's women, also, actively participated in this scheme. MGNREGA was one of the principal sources of alternative income in rural Nabadwip block. Rural areas were most affected by the problems of poverty and the non-availability of work in their hometowns. The rural people are always in hardship and forced to commit suicide due to a lack of their basic needs (food, shelter, medicine, and job opportunities). Against this backdrop, MGNREGA proved to be a miracle for the poor in rural areas. There is no doubt that its promise has charged the hearts and minds of the rural poor with unprecedented hopes and expectations. MGNREGA provides at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year for all who demand work. Marginalised communities, like SC, ST, OBC, and others, are allowed to develop their own private lands. Above all these provisions and activities of NREGA make it more inclusive for workers. However, the government needs to amend the provisions of MGNREGA, like providing more employment opportunities (at least 10 days in a month), regular wage payments, etc. So, it is recommended that the present programme should be further spread in rural areas by means of proper planning, adequate supervision, sufficient work opportunities, timely wage payment, effective implementation, better monitoring, etc. So, the Krishnagar II block as well as the country will reap fruitful benefits if it is properly implemented. It helps to overcome the unemployment, poverty, and migration of rural livelihoods in the Krishnagar II block. MGNREGA has been strengthening the Panchayati-raj Institutions by providing equal work allocations for both men and women at the grassroots level (APO, Krishnagar-II Block 2021).

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