

Examine The Efficacy of The Strategies Used to Spread Knowledge About NREGA In the Different Domains of Kashmir Valley

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Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was notified in India on September 2005 with a mandate to provide at least hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose members above the age of eighteen years volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The main focus of the act is to facilitate the social protection and to provide livelihood security for the people living in rural India by providing employment opportunities and therefore contributing towards the overall development of the local people. The present research paper is attempted to examine the efficiency of the strategies used to spread knowledge about NREGA in different domains of Kashmir Valley. The paper focuses on understanding the efficacy of strategies employed to spread knowledge about MGNREGA and how it has impacted the lives of beneficiaries. This was studied through in-depth interviews and analysis of Geographic, Socio-economic, and Politico-cultural aspects in the regions of Gutyar, Jalsheri, Tulumulla B, and Drend.

1. Introduction

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been a cornerstone of policy aiming at poverty alleviation and employment generation in rural India. A plethora of studies have analyzed various facets of MGNREGA, examining its effectiveness and impact on the rural population. Drèze and Lal (2007) highlighted the effectiveness of MGNREGA in providing employment to vulnerable populations, particularly women, in Rajasthan. This resonates with the findings of Ghosh (2008), who emphasized the program's role in boosting employment, providing economic stability, and enhancing the bargaining power of rural employees. Another study by Khan and Saluja (2008) indicated that MGNREGA positively influenced local production activities, education, wheat production, and animal husbandry. Despite criticisms, there are studies reporting positive impacts. Pankaj and Sharma (2008) reported that MGNREGA significantly contributed to the annual income of beneficiary families in Jharkhand and Bihar, reducing debt and increasing emigration. In line with this, the Institute of Applied Management Research and Planning Commission (2010) found that MGNREGA improved the income levels of beneficiaries. The studies collectively emphasize the need for nuanced understanding, continuous monitoring, and adaptive policy-making to maximize the benefits of MGNREGA. ational Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a flagship initiative by the Indian government, providing a legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to perform unskilled manual work. Despite its ambitious objectives, the efficacy and impact of

the NREGA program in the different geographic, socio-economic, and politico-cultural domains have been subject to widespread debate. This study delves into the implementation and reception of NREGA in two blocks of Jammu and Kashmir, namely Baramulla and Ganderbal, with a specific focus on four villages: Gutyar and Jalsheri from Baramulla and Tulmulla B and Darend from Ganderbal. These blocks and villages were chosen due to their unique geographical locations and distinct socio-economic and political conditions. This study examines the factors influencing the performance of MNREGA and its impact on the lives of beneficiaries in these areas, seeking to identify the most effective strategies for spreading knowledge about NREGA and providing valuable insights for improving its implementation and outcomes.

2. Methods

During the interview and the study, it was absolutely clear that the unfavourable and harsh situation of the mighty Himalayas is neither favourable for most conventional agricultural principles nor they appreciate heavy constructions. The weather during winters forces most of the construction work to shut stop and it's worse during monsoon season. Starting with the Gutyar and Jalsheri villages of Baramulla Block. The beneficiaries from Jalsheri village claimed that despite the Jhelum river passing the district often the villagers are deprived of clean drinking water at home. Though the village is in the valley yet the connectivity via roads is not at par with Gutyar. However, Jalsheri benefited from its geographic location as the irrigation system is much better and feasible, respondents claimed it helps to sustain yield in low monsoon season. Micro-irrigation work in the village has created a lot of opportunities in recent years. Whereas Gutyar which is quite near Baramulla has better roadways and work opportunities. The low participation in Gutyar is easy to understand because workers have other opportunities and various labour jobs that can generate income for more than 100 days. Being around the city and at a much better terrain Gutyar enjoys the benefits of employment opportunities and it reduces the dependency on income generation from government-run schemes. Agricultural activities and related work seem to be depleting in Gutyar as more and more people are utilising the land for some other business. Many respondents of the Gutyar village told us scarcity of irrigation water is another major reason for reducing the number of agricultural-related activities.

While interviewing the beneficiaries and during the study of the Ganderbal block it was discovered that both villages don't suffer from extreme terrain difficulties but the weather isn't helpful. Winters in the district are harsh. While comparing the two the employment scheme in Tulmulla B seems to have performed better despite being further away from the nearest town Ganderbal. Whereas Drend is located very close to Ganderbal which creates better opportunities for migration and other jobs. Geographically speaking Tulmulla B is more efficient and productive in agricultural activities as its terrain and the irrigation system are well organised. A canal flows by the Tulmulla B village which is a major reason behind flourishing crops. Whereas Drend is slowly transforming into a town where people are looking for other possibilities.

2.1 Geographic Aspects

In the geographic context, the analysis revealed that the geographic conditions significantly impacted the effectiveness of MGNREGA in different villages. For instance, Gutyar's proximity to Baramulla and its better terrain provided more employment opportunities, thus reducing the dependency on MGNREGA.

Additionally, Jalsheri, despite being near the Jhelum river, faced issues like lack of clean drinking water, while its micro-irrigation system was more beneficial.

Tulmulla B in Ganderbal block, despite being distant from Ganderbal, performed better under MGNREGA due to its favorable terrain and irrigation system from a nearby canal. Conversely, Drend's proximity to Ganderbal town offered more alternative employment opportunities, making the villagers less reliant on MGNREGA.

2.2 Socio-economic Aspects

When looking into the socio-economic situations of the villages and with the help of interviews it was found that in Baramulla block the Gutyar village is economically better off than the Jalsheri village. Since Gutyar is located nearer to Baramulla and is situated along the national highway there are more employment opportunities in and nearby the village. Landholding of small and marginal farmers is more in Jalsheri than in Gutyar. This is an important factor which explains the fewer women and overall participation in the employment scheme in Gutyar than in Jalsheri. Women's participation in Gutyar is lower than in Jalsheri. During the study it was discovered that most of the families working under the scheme in Gutyar are not only relying on a single income source, hence women are either taking care of farming or other small household businesses. Whereas in Jalsheri the women's participation is at par with the state's women's participation rate. However, the participation is still very low when compared with the national rate which is more than 50% of women's participation in the employment scheme. Jalsheri being at more distance from the town is extremely dependent on the supply of work from the scheme and especially in the lean agricultural season. The educational opportunities being more in Gutyar are also a reason behind fewer people getting enrolled in the program and being much aware of it. More of the beneficiaries employed in Gutyar are marginal farmers or landless labour which influences less progress of asset creation in their village by the employment scheme.

Another important observation was made regarding the differential performance in asset creation in both villages because Jalsheri has a significant number of workers registered under the scheme the work taken and completed aims to uplift the infrastructure of the village and there are comparatively fewer grievances against the functionaries. On the contrary, Gutyar suffers a lot from corruption and rep tape in most of the activities under the scheme.

The duality in the performance of the villages in the Ganderbal block is very similar to the situation of the Baramulla block. Since Darend is nearer to the Ganderbal district there is low overall participation in the employment scheme. As there are several other employment opportunities and migration is more prevalent in Darend. This leaves only a few marginalized participants working under the scheme. There is a reason why there is more women's participation in Darend men tend to look for other opportunities and small businesses, they require less labour work and pay more than what they get from the employment scheme. As the village is situated along the Srinagar-Leh highway goods carriers are more functioning and it results in more business opportunities.

Whereas Tulmulla B is an agricultural and tourism-reliant village situated a little further from Ganderbal district. The village has a better agricultural infrastructure. The irrigation system is robust and functional as a canal flows by the village. Along with various shrines, there is a Hindu temple which generates tourist-based income. Yet the village is mostly engaged in agricultural activities. The landholding of the small and marginal farmers is more than that of Darend. However, women's participation in the village is really low, despite the work demanded in the village being more compared

to Darend. During the interview, it was discovered that society still is a bit conservative and women mostly take care of the household chores and mostly work in their fields.

2.3 Politico-cultural Aspects

The political and cultural nuances also create a lot of differentiating results in the same district between two different villages. Demographically speaking villages in the same district are not very different yet the results and responses of beneficiaries paint a different picture. While talking to beneficiaries of the Baramulla district it was an unprecedented fact that work distribution and asset generation work are favoured by the Sarpanch of the village. Talking about Jalsheri village where the micro irrigation work has benefitted a lot of farmers but a lot of beneficiaries of the scheme claimed that those canals have not covered a lot of houses. It was claimed that the unfinished work is not a coincidence at times it is deliberately not proposed for people who did not vote for the ruling Sarpanch. In the case of Gutyar village where most beneficiaries are landless labours claimed the distribution of work is never fair, since registration under the scheme and agricultural activities are depleting in the village the functionaries are making the best use of what is left of it. Beneficiaries from the Gutyar village alleged that people closer to the Sarpanch and his family members get registered and enjoy the wages without ever working. Such allegations were not made by Jalsheri residents yet they claim that people closer to political representatives enjoy the favours indirectly if not directly. Women representation is quite low in Jalsheri and one factor which came to the attention during the interview session is the discriminatory wage rate practice followed in Jalsheri. Female respondents said it demotivates the women and the opportunity cost of taking care of children and working in their field is more as compared to the low wages provided under the scheme. There is a very low SC-ST population in the district and the beneficiaries from such marginalized groups also allege caste-based discrimination during the allotment of the work.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Ganderbal district where beneficiaries of Darend village alleged political corruption and favouritism is rampant in the employment scheme for a very long time. The beneficiaries from the ST group said they are always overlooked when it comes to job distribution and person-days generation under the scheme. Respondents claimed that they are one of the least working members under the scheme in the village. Darend has a decent women population employed and working under the scheme but all of them alleged discriminatory wage rates. However such was not the case in Tulmulla B where the participation of people in Gram Sabha and Rozgar divas are frequent. Beneficiaries from the Tulmulla B village said some favouritism takes place while selecting the contractor for the asset creation jobs yet the situation in the village is not as bad as it is in Darend.

The strategies employed to disseminate knowledge about MGNREGA vary in efficacy. In regions where strategies are tailored to the local context and socio-cultural sensibilities, the level of awareness and participation is higher. However, in areas where this is not the case, there is a lack of awareness and lower participation rates. The study suggests that knowledge dissemination strategies need to be context-specific, and should utilize local languages, channels, and cultural nuances to be more effective. Also, involving community leaders and local institutions can enhance the efficacy of these strategies.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the research which aimed to examine the efficacy of strategies used to spread knowledge about MGNREGA in different domains. The study analyzed geographic, socio-economic, and

politico-cultural aspects in the regions of Gutyar, Jalsheri, Tulumulla B, and Drend. The main findings and analyses for this objective indicate the following:

- **Geographic Aspects:**
 - Geographic conditions significantly impact the effectiveness of MGNREGA in different villages.
 - Proximity to other towns, better terrain, and access to alternative employment opportunities can reduce the dependency on MGNREGA.
 - Villages with favorable terrain and irrigation systems may perform better under MGNREGA.
- **Socio-economic Aspects:**
 - Socio-economic factors play a role in the performance and participation in MGNREGA.
 - Locations with better socio-economic conditions, more employment opportunities, or higher reliance on MGNREGA during agricultural off-seasons may exhibit different participation patterns.
 - Cultural conservatism and gender dynamics can influence women's participation in MGNREGA.
- **Politico-cultural Aspects:**
 - Politico-cultural factors can influence the implementation and fairness of MGNREGA.
 - Allegations of biased work distribution, favoritism, and corruption were observed in certain villages.
 - Wage discrimination against women and marginalized groups was reported in some areas.
 - Participation in Gram Sabha and Rozgar Divas varied across villages.

Overall, the study highlights the influence of geographic conditions, socio-economic aspects, and politico-cultural nuances on the efficacy of strategies used to spread knowledge about MGNREGA. To make the implementation of MGNREGA more effective and inclusive, it is necessary to address geographic challenges, improve socio-economic conditions, and ensure fairness and transparency in politico-cultural aspects. Context-specific knowledge dissemination strategies that consider local languages, channels, and cultural nuances are crucial for increasing awareness and participation. Involving community leaders and local institutions can enhance the efficacy of these strategies and improve the overall implementation of MGNREGA.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the research, the following recommendations can be made :

- **Strengthening Grievance Redressal Mechanism:**
 - Improve the accessibility, transparency, and efficiency of the grievance redressal mechanism.
 - Ensure that beneficiaries are aware of the mechanism and how to access it.
 - Establish a system for timely and effective resolution of grievances, providing feedback to the complainants.
- **Enhancing Awareness and Knowledge Dissemination:**
 - Tailor knowledge dissemination strategies to the local context, languages, and cultural sensitivities of the target communities.

- Utilize local channels, community leaders, and institutions to effectively disseminate information about MGNREGA.
- Conduct regular awareness campaigns to ensure that beneficiaries are well-informed about their rights, entitlements, and the processes involved in accessing MGNREGA benefits.
- Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions:
 - Provide training and capacity-building programs for elected members of Panchayati Raj Institutions to enhance their understanding of MGNREGA and their roles in its implementation.
 - Establish transparent decision-making processes and promote inclusive participation in decision-making at the local level.
 - Strengthen the accountability mechanisms within Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure effective implementation of MGNREGA.
- Monitoring and Evaluation:
 - Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the implementation, performance, and impact of MGNREGA.
 - Regularly assess the efficacy of different interventions and strategies to identify areas of improvement and inform evidence-based decision-making.
 - Use feedback from beneficiaries, stakeholders, and experts to continually refine and enhance the effectiveness of MGNREGA.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards improving the functioning and impact of MGNREGA, ensuring that it effectively addresses the socio-economic needs of rural communities, provides sustainable livelihood opportunities, and contributes to poverty reduction and rural development.

Key takeaways include the need for tailored implementation strategies that address the unique characteristics of different areas, enhancing transparency and accountability within Panchayati Raj Institutions, improving awareness and accessibility of grievance redressal mechanisms, and promoting gender equality in participation.

In conclusion, MGNREGA holds significant potential for rural development, but it necessitates adaptive strategies, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity to realize its goals and positively impact rural livelihoods and socio-economic conditions.

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