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MGNREGA- a pathway to sustainable development

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a very important concept of the defining ideas of society. Sustainable development is a process to fulfill the needs of current generation without compromising with the fulfillment of these needs of future generation. Its a concept to complete present time requirement without compromising with the future requirement. There are a number of Government program running in achieving sustainability of Economy, Agriculture Forest, Income, Health, Gender Equality and many more. MGNREGA is a flagship program to achieve these goals. MGNREGA is not a program but an act against unemployment. It acts as a growth engine for sustainable development of agriculture economy and empowerment of rural poor including women. This paper highlights the role of rural development scheme MGNREGA in achieving the sustainable development goals. The paper show that MGNREGA is doing well in employing rural people and in the eradication of rural poverty. In addition to this, the scheme has contributed rural people and in the elimination of rural poverty. In addition to this, the scheme has contributed towards gender equality.

Keywords: sustainable development, MGNREGA, gender equality, empowerment

Introduction

India is the largest democracy and the most populated country in the world. Most of the population of the country lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture and other allied activities. There are a number of problems in rural areas in India. India's rural population has been facing poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and other problems. After independence, the Government of India has considered rural development as one of its priorities and so launched many policies and programs for developing rural areas. Economic growth is essential to all kinds of development. So, the central and state governments have adopted several schemes to provide wage employment to the poor in rural India.

Sustainable development is an emerging issue of discussion in the whole world. The development can not only depend on economic development as there are other aspects such as social, political and environmental. So, there is a requirement for simultaneous development of all these components there by resulting into the development of a new concept of sustainable development.

According to Brundtland's Report, "Sustainable development is a development and well-off that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs"^[1]. The sustainable development goals emerged in the year 2012 from the concept of Millennium Development Goals with the main motive to eradicate poverty in the whole world. Further, Sustainable Development Goals cover the issues which affect every aspect of human life. There were interconnected in the Millennium Development Goals

such as no poverty, good health zero hunger, and well being, quality education, clean water and sanitation, and gender equality.

In a country like India, where rural area is directly dependent on climate, the scheme like MGNREGA can help in the regeneration of natural resources and achieve sustainable development. MGNREGA was implemented on February 2, 2006, in 200 (most backward) districts of India. In second phase in 2007-08, the additional 130 districts were covered. Then in the third phase of its implementation in 2008, the act was implemented in whole of India. MGNREGA Act guarantees 100days of employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members are willing to perform unskilled manual work. The objectives of the MGNREGA program are to ensure social protection and livelihood security to rural poor ^[2].

MGNREGA is the most significant poverty alleviation policy implemented for the upliftment and betterment of economically and socially disadvantaged people. It has been working to achieve sustainable development goals, and the scheme's aims align with them. It has been playing a significant role in achieving sustainable development goals.

MGNREGA helped to reduce poverty and the goal of sustainable development can be fulfilled by focusing on different variables of the scheme. The scheme helped to raise the employment and income which facilitated agricultural investment and reduction in migration ^[3]. Through NREGS earnings of women workers had increased and NREGS had also provided more control over their earnings which makes

them economically independent [4]. The activities under MGNREGA were found to have reduced the vulnerability of agricultural production, water resources and livelihoods to uncertain rainfall, water scarcity and poor soil fertility [5]. MGNREGA work was considered as a high social status symbol by women). The work done under MGNREGA was mostly belongs to land development on private lands, waterworks on common lands, afforestation and horticulture work category. The assets created under the scheme were of good quality and well maintained by the local government or by the users themselves [6]. The construction of basic infrastructure facilities under MGNREGS such as road connectivity can be led to rural areas for development.

MGNREGA and sustainable development

MGNREGA is covering many of the goals of sustainable development. It includes the following:

▪ MGNREGA and no poverty

MGNREGA targets rural poverty as it covers the rural poor only. According to the census of India 2011, majority of the population (almost 70 per cent) lives in rural areas of India so, there is need to pay attention on rural poor and this work is done by MGNREGA through the provision of employment opportunities to the population [10].

▪ MGNREGA and economic growth

MGNREGA provides the opportunity to the beneficiaries to demand employment and also ensure guaranteed employment to the applicants. The scheme has different features such as the provision of work within the radius of 5km of village, no contractor is allowed at the worksite, different work facilities such as shade, drinking water, rest, crèche facility compensation for delayed payment, provision of unemployment allowance which leads to the decent work environment and economic growth [11, 12].

▪ MGNREGA and gender equality

MGNREGA provides equal work opportunities for men and

women both. In the scheme, there should be at least 33 per cent women workers out of total workers, equal wages for both men and women, the share of women mates should be 50 per cent at all the worksites. Therefore, all these provisions promote gender equality.

▪ MGNREGA and infrastructure

It helps to develop the infrastructure in rural areas which is advantageous for agriculturists also and for the whole community. The assets such as ponds, wells, tanks, playgrounds, roads etc. All this led to the development of rural infrastructure.

▪ MGNREGA and economic inequalities

MGNREGA aims at reducing the rural-urban divide. As urban areas are more developed than rural areas with more work opportunities, developed infrastructure, more facilities in every aspect. MGNREGA helps rural people to stand on par with urban people and boosts up economic equality by providing rural employment and infrastructure.

▪ MGNREGA and life on land

There are different works permissible under the scheme to make life on land comfortable, healthy and clean such as:

- Water conservation and water harvesting
- Drought proofing includes (afforestation and tree plantation)
- Irrigation canals including micro and minor irrigation work
- Provision of irrigation facility to land owned by households belonging to scheduled caste and scheduled tribes
- Renovation of traditional water bodies including desilting of tanks
- Land development
- Flood control and protection work including drainage in water logged areas
- Rural connectivity to all weather access [13]

Performance of MGNREGA in India

Table 1

Year	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Total employment Provided (Person days) (in crores)	211.42	210.8	218.67	166.28	220.76	224.51	222.27	256.19	254.66	389.09
Person- days provided to women (Percentage)	56.68	57.93	58.07	54.88	55.26	56.16	53.47	54.59	54.78	53.19
Person- days provided to SCs (Percentage)	20.73	21.20	21.99	22.4	22.29	21.32	21.5	20.77	20.38	19.87
Person- days provided to STs (Percentage)	22.56	20.87	19.94	16.97	17.8	17.62	17.61	17.42	18.41	17.95
Person-days provided to differently abled persons	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	461880	462917	606149
Average wage rate per day per person	-	-	-	143.92	154.08	161.65	169.45	179.13	182.09	200.71
Total expenditure (in crores)	36436.50	38495.49	36553.55	36,025.04	44,002.59	58,062.92	63,662.56	69,618.59	68,261.93	111,719.55
Percentage of expenditure on agriculture and allied works	-	-	-	52.81	62.85	66	66.74	66.12	67.54	65.01

Source: www.mgnrega.nic.in

The above table shows that the performance of MGNREGA in India from 2011-12 to 2020-21. It is well known fact that employment is the basis for deletion of poverty and hunger from the society as well as from India. It also helps in bring peace in society as people get busy with their work and there

will be less criminal activities. The data indicates that total employment provided under the MGNREGA scheme was 211.42 crores in the year 2011-12 that has increased to 389.09 crores in the year 2020-21. Inclusion of women in every sphere of life may be social, economic, political is very important. To

empower women in the different areas, MGNREGA is contributing a lot as the share of women in total employment was 56.88 per cent in the year 2011-12 that increased to 58.07 per cent in the year 2013-14 and it has reached 53.19 per cent in the year 2020-21. As MGNREGA focuses on the removal of inequalities and wants to strengthen the marginalized section of society that is why it is important to check the share of SCs and STs in employment provided under the MGNREGA. This table depicts the share of SCs was 20.73 per cent in the year 2011-12 and it has declined to 19.87 per cent in the year 2020-21. Simultaneously, the share of STs has also decreased from 22.56 to 17.95 from the year 2011-12 to 2020-21. Further, the person-days generated to differently abled persons were 461880 in 2018-19 that increased to 606149. Wage rate defines the income generation capacity of the beneficiary. Under the scheme, the average wage rate per day per person was 143.92 in the year 2014-15 that has increased to 200.71 in the year 2020-21. The table further shows that the total expenditure under the MGNREGA scheme in India was Rs. 36436.50 crores in the year 2011-12 that reached to Rs. 111719.55 crores in the year 2020-21. The agriculture sector is the major contributing sector of GDP of the Indian economy. This sector requires much attention. MGNREGA contribution to the agriculture sector is increasing as the share of agriculture and allied sector under the total expenditure has increased from 52.81 per cent in the year 2014-15 to 65.01 in the year 2020-21. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the first program that gets changed into an act, which guarantees 100 days of wage employment in a year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled, manual work (NREGA, 2005). The basic objectives of MGNREGA 2005 are to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household. [www.nrega.nic. in] This work guarantee can also serve other objectives generating productive assets, protecting the environment, rural empowerment of women, reducing rural-urban migration and fostering social equity ^[7]. Thus the objectives of the program include:

- Ensuring social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India through providing employment opportunities.
- Ensuring livelihood security for the poor through creation of durable assets, improved water security, soil conservation and higher land productivity.
- Strengthening drought-proofing and flood management in rural India.
- Aiding in the empowerment of marginalized communities, especially women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the process of a rights- based legislation.
- Strengthening decentralized, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives.
- Effecting greater transparency and accountability in governance.

Conclusion

Thus, we can see that Sustainable development does not focus solely on economic issues rather it includes the three general policy areas namely economy, environment and society. Sustainable Development maintains a balance between the various human needs like the desire to have upgraded lifestyles and feeling of well-being on one hand, and preserves natural resources and ecosystems on another hand ^[8]. Thus, Sustainable Development is a concierge of the divergent factors needed for the existence of the present and future generations. It is generally accepted that sustainable development cannot be achieved without a substantial reduction in the number of people who are poor. If we leave poverty to prevail in Indian societies, then the dream of sustainable development can never be achieved. Sustainable development in India can be attained only if problem of poverty is resolved first. Thus, MGNREGA is right-based approach to poverty reduction and has showed how human rights being supported by an inclusive legal framework and realized in a sustainable way. Convergence is employed as leverage and can be employed as a strategic approach to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development ^[9]. The employment provided under the scheme of MGNREGA can be better used for the fundamentals of achieving development. India since inception of MGNREGA has made significant progress in reducing poverty, hunger and food nutrition which is the basic step of achieving sustainable development. It is suggested that being a part of society it is our responsibility to promote sustainable development by making use of alternate resources rather than making our wants unlimited. Moreover, the government should also take steps to bring together various institutes like private, public NGO's and educational institutes for this mission and must consider MGNREGA as a junction for implementing various policies for achieving sustainability ^[14-16]. The government should not go for making further new policies on sustainable development as they remain idle rather than the government should make proper efforts in implementing the already existing policies It is we who have to decide whether development means affluence or whether development means peace, prosperity and happiness and it is MGNREGA which can be a better strategy for attaining development if implanted suitably.

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