

MGNREGA AND ITS IMPACT ON RURAL WOMEN WORKERS: A CASE STUDY OF HOSHIARPUR AND AMRITSAR DISTRICTS OF PUNJAB.

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Abstract:

It is common in the developing countries that women are being ignored since pre - historic time. The primary objectives of the research are to study the impact of MGNREGA on women workers and to identify the problems in the path of the implementation of the scheme. The paper focuses on the female worker in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts of Punjab to derive conclusions to highlight the impact of the program on the lives of women. Female workers significant benefits reported by the study includes—income gains, social empowerment, more say in intra household decision making and creation of community assets etc. The paper ends up by identify certain barriers to women is access to MGNREGA. The paper is divided into two parts Section A covers the impact on women workers from the point of the view of the Panchayats and section B covers respondents view on the impact on women workers with MGNREGA.

Key Words: MGNREGA, Women Empowerment, Impact of MGNREGA Programme.

* Dr. Shaveta Kaushal, Assistant Professor, Mata Gujri College, SriFatehgarh Sahib, Punjab. provide basic commodities particularly food at controlled prices, available throughout the country, because the poor spend about 80 per cent of their income on food products.

Regular employment at a living wage is the dream and the first demand of the poor in our country. A majority of the poor in India continue to live in rural areas and depend on wage labour for their survival. India has a very long record of employment generation programmes and such employment schemes being used by the state to prevent people from famine. It is a key safety net and a mean for food security. The employment guarantee scheme is supported by the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act (MEGA), 1977 that provides a legal guarantee for work to rural population. Since then, it has been providing employment to lakhs of the rural poor people every year under the employment guarantee scheme. Some other facilities provided under employment guarantee scheme are free medical facilities and an ex- gratia payment for disabled person.

Since the early 1950s, the government of India has initiated, sustained, and reframed various planning schemes to help the poor to attain self-sufficiency in acquisition of food and to overcome the hunger and poverty. Probably the most important initiative has been taken to

NREGA is a landmark legislation enacted on September 5, 2005 and launched on February 6, 2006. Now it covers all rural areas of India. The name of the NREG Act has been changed to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October, 2009 (*Ministry of Rural Development, 2009*). The Act provides a legal guarantee for hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of rural households willing to do public works at the statutory minimum wage. During Phase I, this act was notified in 200 districts (most backward) of 27 States with effect from February 6, 2006 and then extended to additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-08 under Phase II. The remaining 274 rural districts had notified under the MGNREGA with effect from April 1, 2008 under Phase III.

In February 2006 under Phase I this scheme was started in most literate district of Punjab i.e. Hoshiarpur. The work was started at Samundra village in Garhshankar Block, district Hoshiarpur where 100 days of employment provided to Households. In the year 2007, under Phase II three more districts, Amritsar, Jalandhar and Nawanshehar, were also covered. In the light of these facts, it is significant to study the impact and implementation of MGNREGA in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar districts.

The one of the main feature of MGNREGA is minimum 100 days employment is offered to all adult members of a registered family, in a financial year, who are willing to do unskilled manual work. Under the programme 1/3 opportunities of the works are available to women. However, there is no upper ceiling on the number of employment days. The Programme Officer at the block level will be responsible for making available the manual work within 15 days of the application. The job seeker will have to work for not less than fortnight, i.e. he/she will have to work continuously for at least 15 days at a given point of time. An advance application can also be made for the employment. The intimation for offering employment is given in writing and through public notice.

Objectives of the Present Study

The broad objectives of the research work are:

1. To study the rural employment scenario in Punjab and in the districts of Amritsar and Hoshiarpur.
2. To analyse block-wise duration of participation of workers in NREG Programme.
3. To evaluate the implementation of MGNREGA.
4. To examine the problems faced by the women workers.
5. To examine the impact of MGNREGA on the employment and income of the beneficiaries vis-a-vis asset formation.

Methodology

In the context of above mentioned objectives of the study, the following methodology is applied. The research work is mainly based upon primary and secondary data. The study focuses on rural employment scenario of the districts of Hoshiarpur and Amritsar, in Punjab. In order to collect primary data district Hoshiarpur is selected, as this was the first district in which MGNREGA was implemented. Amritsar district is selected as this was selected for implementation of MGNREGA during the second phase.

Study covers the period from 1st April 2006 to 31st March 2011. The secondary data are collected upto April 2011 so that latest updated works and financial performance under MGNREGA could be collected.

The following criterion for sample design in selection of blocks, gram panchayats and workers is used. For collection of primary information a detailed questionnaire was prepared and it is used for collection of primary data.

The data from the selected households are collected through personal interviews. A total of 4 blocks are selected, 2 each from each district. The survey is conducted from 2 panchayats, from each development block.

Blocks are selected on the basis of indicators such as rural population, rural worker participation rate, number of banks or post offices, number of literates, number of job cards issued etc. Another criterion based on per person employment provided is also used. On the basis of these indicators one block is selected from the better performing blocks and the other one from the poor performing blocks.

Villages are selected on the basis of performance indicators like Job cards, persondays employment generated and utilization of funds. On the basis of these indicators one village was selected from the better performing villages in which 100-120 households are issued job cards and the other village selected from the poor performing villages in which the number of job cards issued are upto 60-80 households per person employment provided is also considered. Two panchayats named Bassi Jaura and Bihala from Hoshiarpur-1 and from Hoshiarpur-II, Bassi Maruf Sailan and Bainstaniwal from Hoshiarpur-II are selected on the basis above mentioned criterion. In Amritsar district two panchayat namely Guru Tegh Bahadur Nagar and Rattangarh from Block Rayya and Fatehgarh Sukar Chak and Mudhal Panchayats from Block Verka are selected.

In total, 516 beneficiary households have worked under MGNREGA in eight villages. Out of these 516, fifty per cent of the beneficiary households are interviewed as per their caste

distribution such as SCs, OBCs and others. Following the criterion of number of job cards issued from 258 workers, 70 workers from district Hoshiarpur and 188 workers from Amritsar district are interviewed to collect primary information.

In order to examine the scenario in regard to MGNREGA in Punjab, performance and inter-state and inter-district comparison in terms of employment, data are collected from the website of MGNREGA and Ministry of Rural Development (MORD) and from the Block Development Programme Officer (BDPO) related to MGNREGA. Certain data have been collected from the Publications of Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Census Reports 1991 and 2001, information compiled by statistical wing in the Directorate of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Panchayat registers, revenue papers, assets created registers of the blocks, etc. Data and its analysis have been presented in tabular form percentages are calculated to draw the inferences. For the analysis of data, simple statistical techniques such as percentages and averages have been used.

The first step in the planning process has to be initiated at the gram sabha level. Even the identification of the beneficiaries is to be done by the gram sabhas. The gram sabhas have to carry out a social audit of all the projects, within their jurisdiction (MGNREGA Guidelines, 2005). The MGNREGA provides an opportunity under which PRI's will have access to fairly adequate resources to meet the expectations of the rural population by not only generating wage employment for the needy but also creating useful community assets, which will further catalyse socio-economic development of rural areas. Thus, the role of gram panchayats becomes very important. In this perspective, here an attempt has been made to analyse the role of the gram panchayat regarding MGNREGA.

Table 1 Impact of MGNREGA on Women's Participation in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

Districts	Hoshiarpur		Amritsar	
Impact / Blocks ↓	Hoshiarpur-I →	Hoshiarpur-II	Rayya	Verka

Less participation				
Due to domestic responsibility	1(50)	1(50)	2(100)	0
Due to other work available	1(50)	1(50)	0	2(100)
Total Less participation	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)
More participation				
Women getting same wages as men	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)
Total panchayats	2	2	2	2

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

As we know that MGNREGA has made it mandatory to give 33 per cent representation to women, but the women in agriculture societies, generally do not participate in the labour market due to their domestic responsibilities or any other work available to them. So it would be interesting to know here, if MGNREGA is really creating the women on equal footing or there is any gender bias in it. The table 1 depicts the situation in regard to impact of MGNREGA on women in panchayats of different villages. In Hoshiarpur-1, when query was put regarding the lack of participation of women as one panchayat reported no participation due to other (domestic) responsibilities and one other panchayat reported no participation due to availability of work at somewhere else. In Hoshiarpur-II block one out of two panchayats said that they were not participating due to domestic responsibility.

Both the panchayats also gave the reason for non-participation due to other work available. In Amritsar district both panchayats of Rayya Block responded that the cause of non-participation is domestic responsibility. In Verka block of Amritsar district both panchayat gave the reason of no participation as responsibility and All the eight panchayats were of the view that women are getting same wages as men. Work availability at place is also the reason.

Table: 2 Problems in Implementation of MGNREGA in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

Districts Problems / Blocks→ ↓	Hoshiarpur		Amritsar		Total
	Hoshiarpur-I	Hoshiarpur-II	Rayya	Verka	Panchayats
<i>Delay in receipt of funds</i>	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	8(100)
60:40 ratio is not feasible	1(50)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	7(87.5)
No extra funds with Panchayats	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	8(100)
Lack of staff	2(100)	1(50)	1(50)	2(100)	6(75)
Banking time does not suit with their working hours	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	8(100)
Lack of awareness among people	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	8(100)
Less pay to Mate	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	8(100)
Total Panchayats	2	2	2	2	8

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Table 2 indicates the problems in implementation of MGNREGS in different villages according to representative of panchayats. All the eight panchayats from 4 blocks complained about the delay in receiving funds. All of these panchayats invariably find that lack of awareness among people about MGNREGA, unsuitability of banking hours to the working hours and less pay to mate are among the main impediment to successful implementation of MGNREGA in these blocks. Besides, 87.5 per cent of the total panchayats believe that the rigidity of keeping the ratio of 60:40 for spending upon labour and material is not practical and many times may lead to wastage of resources. According to them, sometime in public works we may be needing more of material, while in some other cases we may be needing more of workers. The rigidity of this ratio generally leads to either lack of resources or under-utilisation of available funds. Similarly,

75 per cent of the surveyed panchayats also complain about lack of supportive staff, which leads to inefficient implementation of MGNREGA in these blocks. The panchayats were also unequivocal in acknowledging the problem of lack of extra funds. As far as the lack of staff is concerned all the panchayats of Hoshiarpur-I and Verka except one each in Hoshiarpur-II and Rayya block recognized it as a problem. All the panchayats are of the opinion that the banking timing is not in accordance with their working hours so there is a need to introduce ATM cards to MGNREGA workers.

The table: 3 depict the situation in regard to impact of MGNREGA on women in Amritsar and Hoshiarpur districts. All the eight panchayats were of the view that women were getting same wages as men. In Hoshiarpur-1, when query was put regarding the lack of participation of women workers, reported no participation due to other responsibilities and due to availability of work at somewhere else. In Hoshiarpur-II, women from one out of two block said that they were not participating due to responsibilities. In the surveyed block 90 per cent and 84 per cent workers reported it provides economic independence to women in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar districts respectively. Out of the total workers among SCs, the majority of workers is satisfied and gave their view it has positive impact on women workers with the introduction of this scheme i.e. 89 per cent and 85 per cent from Hoshiarpur and Amritsar respectively. In district Amritsar, only workers of block Verka reported, MGNREGA has not much impact on women because only few women worked in MGNREGA. In Amritsar district the women from both panchayats of Rayya block responded that the causes of non-participation are both responsibilities and work availability at somewhere else. In Verka block of Amritsar district women from one panchayat gave the reason of no participation as responsibilities they have. In other panchayat work availability at other place is also the reason.

Table 3: Impact of MGNREGA on Economic Independence of Women

View Blocks ↓	<i>Improved very much</i>			<i>Improved</i>			Same as before			Grand Total
	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshi arpur 2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia rpur2	Total	
SC	18	12	30(48)	5	21	26(41)	7	0	7(11)	63(100)
OBC	1	0	1(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(100)
General	3	2	5(83)	1	0	1(17)	0	0	0	6(100)
Total	22	14	36(51)	6	12	27(39)	7	0	7(10)	70(100)
Amritsar	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	Verka	Total	Total
SC	43	25	68(43)	33	34	67(42)	50	19	24(15)	159(100)
OBC	3	1	4(40)	1	2	3(30)	0	3	3(30)	10(100)
General	4	1	5(26)	8	33	11(58)	1	22	3(16)	19(100)
Total	50	27	77(41)	42	39	81(43)	6	24	30(16)	188(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

During the survey, some of the women shared their experiences from MGNREGA:

- According to women worker they got employment at the door step and they don't have to go place to place looking for work. They personally feel that without MGNREGA, it was very difficult to fulfill needs of their family.
- One women's husband was a drunkard and she felt that MGNREGA offered, a more comfortable life and provide a kind of social security to them.

In Amritsar and Hoshiarpur district, the women responded that the causes of non-participation were responsibilities and work availability nearby. But the programme can have a positive impact on the social and economic well-being of rural labourers and their families. In general, even

women who were not so utterly dependent on the MGNREGA, perceived it as giving them a sense of independence and security. It also offered the possibility of staying on in their village. The wages, they earned as MGNREGA workers, enabled them to accomplish a number of things ranging from paying off their debts or spending on children's health and education or saving and meeting day-to-day household expenses. In particular, it holds the powerful prospect of bringing major changes in the lives of women. At the same time, however, some significant challenges frustrate this transformative promise of the MGNREGA. One of them is the issue of childcare, which is easily overlooked. MGNREGA and women's assertion is the growing contribution of women to the source of their households' livelihood. MGNREGA is also an opportunity to redefine the rural Indian women's identity in various ways; decision making, spending their wages independently or on their children's education and clearing debts, alleviate poverty and provide a social floor.

Table 4 : Impact of MGNREGA on Children's Education of MGNREGA Workers in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

View Blocks → ↓	<i>Improved very much</i>			<i>Improved</i>			<i>Same as before</i>			Grand Total
	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshi arpur 2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	
Hoshiarpur										
SC	17	11	28(44)	7	21	28(44)	6	1	7(12)	63(100)
OBC	1	0	1(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(100)
General	2	2	4(67)	2	0	2(33)	0	0	0	6(100)
Total	20	13	33(47)	9	21	30(43)	6	1	7(10)	70(100)
Amritsar	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Total
SC	28	16	44(28)	45	45	78(49)	20	17	37(23)	159(100)
OBC	1	0	1(10)	5	5	8(80)	0	1	1(10)	10(100)
General	4	4	8(42)	1	1	8(42)	2	1	3(16)	19(100)
Total	33	20	53(28)	51	51	94(50)	22	19	41(22)	188(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Table 4 depicts the impact of MGNREGA on the education of children of the workers revealed that the numbers of dropouts from the schools has decreased. Out of the total workers, 88 per cent of the workers who belong to schedule caste has a view that now they are able to send their children to school and 77 per cent workers from Amritsar which represent the same caste were of the same view. So with income generated through MGNREGA it has positive impact on education of children. Most of the workers are now sending their children to schools. About 10 per cent from Hoshiarpur and 22 per cent of the workers from Amritsar, out of the total workers reported that MGNREGA has no impact on the education of their children.

Table 5 : Impact on Economic Conditions of Family of MGNREGA Workers in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

View Blocks ↓	<i>Improved very much</i>			<i>Improved</i>			Same as before			Grand Total
	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshi arpur 2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	
SC	17	7	24(38)	10	23	33(52)	3	3	6(10)	63(100)
OBC	1	0	1(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(100)
General	3	2	5(83)	1	0	1(17)	0	0	0	6(100)
Total	21	9	30(43)	11	23	34(48)	3	3	6(9)	70(100)
Amritsar	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Total
SC	42	21	63(40)	31	52	83(52)	8	5	13(8)	159(100)
OBC	2	2	4(40)	2	3	5(50)	0	1	1(10)	10(100)
General	6	2	8(42)	6	3	9(47)	1	1	2((11)	19(100)
Total	50	25	75(40)	39	58	97(52)	9	7	16(8)	188(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

It has been reported by the workers i.e. 91 per cent from the Hoshiarpur and 92 per cent from Amritsar that their economic condition has improved a lot. Among SC workers 90 per cent from the Hoshiarpur and 92 per cent from Amritsar are of the same view that it has a positive impact on their economic condition with 100 days of employment guarantee. (Vide Table: 5)

Table 6 examines the purchasing power of workers in local Economy. With the introduction of this Act purchasing power of the workers has also increased. Among surveyed workers only 13 per cent from Hoshiarpur and 15 per cent from Amritsar, reported that expenditure remains the same and MGNREGA has no impact, but this ratio of negative respondents is very little.

Table 6: Impact of MGNREGA on Purchasing Power of MGNREGA Workers in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

View Blocks ↓	<i>Improved very much</i>			<i>Improved</i>			<i>Same as before</i>			Grand Total
	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshi arpur 2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	
SC	14	2	16(26)	8	30	38(60)	8	1	9(14)	63(100)
OBC	1	0	1(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(100)
General	2	2	4(66)	2	0	2(34)	0	0	0	6(100)
Total	17	4	21(30)	10	30	40(57)	8	1	9(13)	70(100)
Amritsar	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	Verka	Total	Total
SC	34	14	48(30)	29	59	88(55)	18	5	23(15)	159(100)
OBC	1	2	3(30)	1	4	5(50)	2	0	2(20)	10(100)
General	4	2	6(32)	7	4	11(58)	2	0	2(10)	19(100)
Total	39	18	57(30)	37	67	104(55)	22	5	27(15)	188(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Table 7 evaluates Impact of MGNREGA on assets usefulness as one of the most important objective of MGNREGA is to provide guaranteed wage employment to rural poor through creating assets for community for the benefit of all residents living in the area. It is clearly shown through the data, 100 per cent were of the opinion that assets are useful not only to the people who work there but to the whole community. The work of digging and cleaning of ponds not only increase the water holding capacity of ponds but also provide opportunity to start fishing in ponds.

Along with providing employment opportunities for people, the MGNREGA also aims at creating sustainable assets, which would in the long term, have positive impact on the economy of the village. The works on rural connectivity open many opportunities for the people to start livelihood activities and it helped villagers a lot and they now feel very convenient. Along with this with increase in income of MGNREGA workers it helps people to reduce poverty upto great extent as data reveals the fact that 100 per cent of the workers reported that as the aim of MGNREGA is to provide employment, several strategies are used to improve effectiveness of the programme so that benefits may reach to the poorest of the poor and it has positive impact.

Table 7: Impact of MGNREGA on Assets Usefulness in Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Districts

View Blocks → ↓	<i>Improved very much</i>			<i>Improved</i>			<i>Same as before</i>			Grand Total
	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia r pur2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshi arpur 2	Total	Hoshi arpur 1	Hoshia rpur2	<i>Total</i>	
Hoshiarpur										
SC	33	30	63(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	63(100)
OBC	0	1	1(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(100)
General	2	4	6(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	6(100)
Total	35	35	70(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	70(100)
Amritsar	Rayya	Verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Rayya	verka	Total	Total
SC	81	78	159(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	159(100)

OBC	4	6	10(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	10(100)
General	13	6	19(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	19(100)
Total	98	90	188(100)	0	0	0	0	0	0	188(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

MGNREGA is a programme, which combines the economic development and social justice functions in a context of local planning and implementation, providing safety net for vulnerable groups, when employment opportunities are scarce. Thus, the legal empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions would not automatically lead to their actual strengthening, unless a conscious and purposive effort is taken to create capacity, develop processes and build systems to enable PRIs to play the deliberate role. The evidence in the districts of Amritsar and Hoshiarpur shows that the gram panchayats plays a pivotal role. Table 5.57 shows that out of total workers 17 per cent of Hoshiarpur district and 15 per cent of district Amritsar, reported that the role of panchayats remains the same and rest of the worker were of the view that after MGNREGA the role of the gram panchayats has assumed a greater importance than before.

Problems in Implementation and Suggestions for Effective Implementation of MGNREGA

There are some problems in the implementation of the scheme like lack of awareness among people, irregular flow of fund and work selection is not proper. And to make this scheme more successful some suggestions are given by workers to make it more effective.

Table 8 : Problems in Implementation of MGNREGA According to MGNREGA Workers

View Blocks	→ Less awareness among people	Irregular flow of fund	Work selection is not proper	Total
Hoshiarpur-1	14(40)	15(43)	6(17)	35 (100)
Hoshiarpur-2	5(14)	17(60)	13(26)	35 (100)
Rayya	42(43)	32(33)	24(26)	98 (100)
Verka	49(54)	16(18)	25(28)	90 (100)
Total	110(43)	80(31)	68(26)	258 (100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Table 9 : Unemployment Allowances should be Provided to MGNREGA Workers

View/ Blocks	Provided unemployment allowances	Not aware	Total
Hoshiarpur-1			
SC	19(63)	11(37)	30 (100)
OBC	0(0)	1(100)	1 (100)
GENERAL	2(50)	2(50)	4 (100)
TOTAL	21(60)	14(40)	35 (100)
Hoshiarpur-2			
SC	23(70)	10(30)	33 (100)
OBC	0(0)	0(0)	0 (00)
GENERAL	2(100)	0(0)	2 (100)
TOTAL	25(71)	10(29)	35 (100)
Rayya			
SC	40(49)	41(51)	81 (100)

OBC	2(50)	2(50)	4 (100)
GENERAL	2(15)	11(85)	13 (100)
TOTAL	44(45)	54(55)	98 (100)
Verka			
SC	45(58)	33(42)	78 (100)
OBC	5(83)	1(17)	6 (100)
GENERAL	3(50)	3(50)	6 (100)
TOTAL	53(59)	37(41)	90 (100)
Grand Total	143(55)	115(45)	258 (100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

It is generally blamed that lack of knowledge; inadequate funds and improper selection of work are the major impediment in the working of MGNREGA. Table 8 shows that 43 per cent of the MGNREGA workers believed that lack of awareness among people about MGNREGA is the major problem in implementation of this programme. Further for 31 per cent of the workers, the irregular flow of funds and for 26 per cent, improper selection of work is the main reason behind it. (Vide. Table 8)

More than 55 per cent of the workers suggested that unemployment allowances should be provided to the MGNREGA workers but about 45 per cent of the workers were not aware about it. In comparison to Amritsar, workers in Hoshiarpur are more aware about unemployment allowances but if it is compared Table 5.24, as per the awareness about the programme is concerned, it has been found during the survey that all of the workers (i.e. 100 per cent) were aware about this scheme. According to them MGNREGA means only 100 days of employment guarantee. But they were not acquainted with the basic rules of the scheme. (Vide. Table 9)

Table 10 : Number of Working Days should be Enhanced under MGNREGA

District/view	100-200 days	200-300 days	whole year	Total
Hoshiarpur-1				
SC	10(33)	12(40)	8(27)	30 (100)
OBC	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	1 (100)
GENERAL	1(25)	1(25)	2(50)	4 (100)
TOTAL	11(31)	14(40)	10(29)	35 (100)
Hoshiarpur-2				
SC	8(24)	15(46)	10(30)	33 (100)
OBC	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0 (00)
GENERAL	0(0)	2(100)	0(0)	2 (100)
TOTAL	8(23)	17(49)	10(28)	35 (100)
Rayya				
SC	30(37)	41(50)	10(13)	81 (100)
OBC	1(25)	2(50)	1(25)	4 (100)
GENERAL	2(15)	8(62)	3(23)	13 (100)
TOTAL	33(34)	51(52)	14(14)	98 (100)
Verka				
SC	10(13)	58(74)	10(13)	78 (100)
OBC	2(33)	2(33)	2(34)	6 (100)
GENERAL	3(50)	1(17)	2(33)	6 (100)
TOTAL	15(17)	61(68)	14(15)	90 (100)
Grand Total	67(26)	143(55)	48(19)	258 (100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

The workers suggested that there is need to increase the number of working days. In Hoshiarpur– I and II, respectively, 40 and 49 per cent of the workers suggested, it should be between 200 to 300 days in a financial year only then it can be termed as employment guarantee and in block Rayya and Verka, district Amritsar, 52 and 68 per cent respectively were of the same view. Among all blocks workers belonging to schedule caste in Verka i.e. 74 per cent, suggested that it

should provide employment more than 200 days because they need it, so that it can improve their economic condition. In all surveyed blocks of Hoshiarpur district, about 29 per cent and in Amritsar district about 15 per cent suggested that under MGNREGA employment should be provided for the whole year (Vide.Table.10).

Table 11 : Increase in Wage Rates and Continuity in Work under MGNREGA

Block /view	To increase wage rate	Total	Continuity in work	Total
Hoshiarpur-1				
SC	30(100)	30(100)	18(60)	30(100)
OBC	1(100)	1(100)	1(100)	1(100)
GENERAL	4(100)	4(100)	3(75)	4(100)
TOTAL	35(100)	35(100)	22(63)	35(100)
Hoshiarpur-2				
SC	33(100)	33(100)	14(42)	33(100)
OBC	0	0(0)	0	0(0)
GENERAL	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)
TOTAL	35(100)	35(100)	16(46)	35(100)
Rayya				
SC	81(100)	81(100)	40(49)	81(100)
OBC	4(100)	4(100)	2(50)	4(100)
GENERAL	13(100)	13(100)	2(15)	13(100)
TOTAL	98(100)	98(100)	44(45)	98(100)
Verka				
SC	78(100)	78(100)	29(37)	78(100)
OBC	6(100)	6(100)	2(33)	6(100)
GENERAL	6(100)	6(100)	1(17)	6(100)
TOTAL	90(100)	90(100)	32(36)	90(100)
Grand Total	258(100)	258(100)	114(44)	258(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Table 11, shows that 100 per cent of the workers suggested that there is need to increase wage rate and 44 per cent were of the view that there should be continuity in work.

Further table 12 shows that to make the successful implementation of MGNREGA, 10 to 20 per cent workers suggested that grant should be increased and 5 to 20 per cent were of the view that camps should be organized for the awareness regarding the worksite facilities, about the right to work and if it is not available then their voice should be undertaken.

Table 12 : Grant and Campaign for the Proper Implementation of MGNREGA

View → Block ↓	Grant to be increased	Total	Campaign need to be organised	Total
Hoshiarpur-1				
SC	7(23)	30(100)	1(3)	30(100)
OBC	0	1(100)	0	1(100)
GENERAL	0	4(100)	0	4(100)
TOTAL	7(20)	35(100)	1(3)	35(100)
Hoshiarpur-2				
SC	1(3)	33(100)	2(6)	33(100)
OBC	0(0)	0(0)	0	0(0)
GENERAL	0(0)	2(100)	0	2(100)
TOTAL	1(3)	35(100)	2(6)	35(100)
Rayya				
SC	8(10)	81(100)	12(15)	81(100)
OBC	1(25)	4(100)	1(25)	4(100)
GENERAL	1(8)	13(100)	2(15)	13(100)
TOTAL	10(10)	98(100)	15(15)	98(100)
Verka				
SC	6(7)	78(100)	10(13)	78(100)
OBC	1(17)	6(100)	3(50)	6(100)
GENERAL	1(17)	6(100)	2(33)	6(100)
TOTAL	8(9)	90(100)	15(17)	90(100)
Grand Total	26(10)	258(100)	33(13)	258(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

The work burden has increased tremendously particularly on the technical staff and upon those persons directly responsible for maintaining the registers and accounts, for the administrative system enshrined in NREG Act. It is clear that panchayat requires additional support in manpower and this will result in higher administrative costs.

It has been realized that a large number of workers were not aware of even the basic rules of the scheme. Therefore, there is need for continuous awareness programmes, otherwise people all over again'll remain deprived from this employment guarantee. The village panchayats have to be inclined to take up more works to satisfy local demand for sustainable local developments like housing, maintenance of public assets, anganwadis, primary schools, local sanitation work etc.

Table 13 : Suggestions given by MGNREGA Workers for Effective Implementation of MGNREGA

View → Blocks ↓	To increase wage rate	Provided unemployment allowances	Continuity in work	grant to be increased	no. of days to be increased	Campaign should be organised	Total respon dents
Hoshiarpur-1							
SC	30(100)	19(63)	18(60)	7(23)	30(100)	1(3)	30(100)
OBC	1(100)	0(0)	1(100)	0	1(100)	0	1(100)
GENERAL	4(100)	2(50)	3(75)	0	4(100)	0	4(100)
TOTAL	35(100)	21(60)	22(63)	7(20)	35(100)	1(3)	35(100)
Hoshiarpur-2							
SC	33(100)	23(70)	14(42)	1(3)	33(100)	2(6)	33(100)
OBC	0	0(0)	0	0(0)	0	0	0(0)
GENERAL	2(100)	2(100)	2(100)	0(0)	2(100)	0	2(100)
TOTAL	35(100)	25(71)	16(46)	1(3)	35(100)	2(6)	35(100)
Rayya							
SC	81(100)	40(49)	40(49)	8(10)	81(100)	12(15)	81(100)
OBC	4(100)	2(50)	2(50)	1(25)	4(100)	1(25)	4(100)
GENERAL	13(100)	2(15)	2(15)	1(8)	13(100)	2(15)	13(100)

TOTAL	98(100)	44(45)	44(45)	10(10)	98(100)	15(15)	98(100)
Verka							
SC	78(100)	45(58)	29(37)	6(7)	78(100)	10(13)	78(100)
OBC	6(100)	5(83)	2(33)	1(17)	6(100)	3(50)	6(100)
GENERAL	6(100)	3(50)	1(17)	1(17)	6(100)	2(33)	6(100)
TOTAL	90(100)	53(59)	32(36)	8(9)	90(100)	15(17)	90(100)
Grand Total	258(100)	143(55)	114(44)	26(10)	258(100)	33(13)	258(100)

Source: Field survey

Note: Figures in parenthesis shows the percentages out of their respective total.

Material procurement and hiring of skilled labour pose a major challenge in maintaining the corruption free environment. Appropriate systems for procurement are not yet in place. Work should be assigned according to the capability of workers. Further there should be sufficient flexibility in the ratio of labour cost and material cost which varies according to the nature of the work. The panchayat should be given autonomy to decide about this ratio so that the resources could be optimally used in order to promote welfare among the poor masses. The integration with People's Plan means networking of people with gram panchayats or at block level is also urgently required.

It is clear from the above discussion that there is need to provide regular and more than 100 days of works as well as wages offered under MGNREGS are less than the wages prevailing in the local market. So there is need to increase the wage rate only then this scheme will attract the workers to get registered themselves. There is also a need to organize the awareness camps at the village level so that workers, they know each and every objective of this scheme and funds should be increased for generating more employment opportunities. People are not aware about the unemployment allowances and it could only be possible if proper information is provided by the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Lastly, there should be continuity in the work, so that workers would receive benefit of this scheme by getting regular work at their door step.

Suggestions Emerging from the Analysis

Suggestions are also given by the workers and panchayats to make MGNREGA more effective. The suggestion to organize an awareness camp among the people is given by each panchayat. All the panchayats also suggest that the measurement scale should also be taken care of and must be checked for any adulteration. The demand for computer operator is also put forward by each panchayat. Among 8 panchayats, seven were of the opinion that material wage ratio, 60:40 ratio should be changed. Every panchayat has raised the demand to start different types of works to increase the participation of women workers. The requirement of extra staff is also expressed by two panchayats, one each from Hoshiarpur-I block and Rayya Block. Regarding mates, it is suggested by all the panchayats that more payment should be made to them and mate should be given training for their jobs. Regarding the suitability of banking timings with working hours of MGNREGA workers, all the panchayats demand of change in banking hours or alternative method of payment. All the panchayats demand the regular flow of funds along with unemployment allowances for the workers. The suggestion of training to panchayat members regarding MGNREGA is also given by the panchayats. It is also suggested by every panchayat the minimum wage of skilled labourers should be increased according to market wage rate.

Minimum wage under MGNREGA should be increased keeping in view its impact on unorganized sectors, especially agriculture. It must be ensured that it must include the really poor and needy. Possibilities of MGNREGA being dovetailed with the farming activities, so as to minimize its adverse effect on agriculture, should be explored. The constructive impact of the 100 day employment guarantee must be confined strictly to months when there is no harvesting or sowing activity so that it does not affect agriculture adversely. With the rural workforce drawn into this scheme, the mechanisation and modernisation of agriculture needs to be focused upon. Most of the State governments have issued job cards on the basis of a pre-existing household listed on the basis of common kitchen, which is used for the Census and the ration cards. For example, in the case of a joint family with 6 adults, the common kitchen definition reduces entitlements. This makes a dramatic difference to the livelihood security of such households. Several respondents are living as joint family and 6-10 members of the joint family are registered on the basis of same job card. This effectively reduces their entitlement since smaller households

get more work per person. This is obviously unfair and heavily pitted against joint families. Hence, a more inclusive definition of household must be used.

There is a great pressure to exclude old persons. The reason is the absence of a different productivity norm for the older persons, and as result the workers themselves are raising this demand of exclusion. The second is the restriction on number of eligible workers per household which can be one or two and to exclude the sixty plus. Both of the problems can be easily tackled. The old person either should be given the reasonable amount of pension under the National Old Age Pension scheme or should be provided work if they demand.

There are no creches for children at the worksites, the reason for which women do not bring children with them. The local administration claims that they do not provide childcare since no children come with the women workers. If a women is deputed to look after the children then there may be 5 or more such children at the worksite. There are no proper facilities for a creche and therefore women feel constrained to bring their children to the worksite. Proper crèches with some provision for nutrition should be set up in the village itself as an MGNREGS activity.

It is very crucial to plan the works, which can be taken up during the period of great need when there is off-season in agriculture and poor people out-migrate for employment and for them the question of food security becomes important. During the heavy rainy season i.e. the months of August and September when the large scale earth related works cannot be taken up, then there should be some alternative works to create employment.

As far as the creation of useful assets is concerned, only the works related to rainwater harvesting and conservation, desilting and renovation of old ponds/tanks and digging up of new farm ponds are mainly being carried out under MGNREGS. Afforestation under MGNREGA may be a one of the activity which can be linked to other forestry programmes. Rural sanitation is another area, which can be dovetailed with this programme. This will also help in achieving the goals of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). Several works that were taken up under MGNREGA remained incomplete even after two years of their start. Since there is no provision to factor in the completion of work in the overall planning, State governments have initiated a

large number of new works and abandoned the old incomplete works mid-way. The earth related works like land levelling under the programme, were washed away during monsoons. This led to enormous wastage of financial and human resources. Completion and maintenance of works under MGNREGA should be made compulsory. Success of MGNREGA should not only be assessed in terms of employment provided but also in terms of the asset created. The village development through productive asset creation should be made an important objective of this scheme. This will ensure that work done is completed and is useful. With so much money involved in this scheme, the government should take serious measures to see that the money is utilised to create assets in the villages, thus bringing about a real change in the rural economy. A record of the assets created under MGNREGA must be maintained at the district headquarters. A National/State level audit needs to be done to see whether all productive works have been done under MGNREGA or not.

It emerges from the analysis that MGNREGA needs a special attention to make it more effective in Punjab. It must be understood that MGNREGA cannot be a long-term permanent solution to the unemployment problem of rural India. A comprehensive and a more sustainable solution that can result in large scale self-employment opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors in the rural areas, stimulate demand and last but not the least, increase rural productivity is still to be formulated as a policy shift paradigm.

An extended effort to raise the awareness level regarding MGNREGA among the people should be conducted so that the people can utilise their rights and may strengthen their capacity to avoid exploitation. The people can help to make the Act more accountable. The MGNREGA to serve as a social security net for the rural poor, the 100 day guarantee of working days per year to all participants under the Act must be ensured. Atleast minimum wages should be paid according to the wages prevailing in the market or fixed by the Punjab government. To increase the quality of life of the participants in the MGNREGA, the wages received must generate a saving to the workers so that positive change can happen in their life. But it can be possible only if employment guarantee is not restricted to the number of days. The maintenance of job cards must be taken care of the villagers to minimise the chances of the people to become victims of exploitation. In the context of references by the governmental official who are stating that the

MGNREGA has failed to attract the villagers in the study area, they should be made accountable so that the objective reality comes out. As the banking timings are not in accordance with the working hours of workers so there is a need to introduce ATM cards to MGNREGA workers with thumb impression. The transfer of wages to the worker's bank account is a substantial protection against the embezzlement and workers can easily manage their accounts. The villages panchayats have to be inclined to take up more works to satisfy local demand for sustainable local development like housing, maintenance of public assets, anganwadis, primary schools, local sanitation work etc. Appropriate systems for procurement of materials etc. are not yet in place which should be introduced.

To sum up, to realize potentials of the scheme it is necessary to move on to a concerted capacity building exercise with focus on panchayat empowerment in the context of MGNREGA. A policy shift is needed to make MGNREGA more effective and to empower the Panchayati Raj Institutions so that these can become an instrument in poverty reduction and to achieve inclusive growth through participatory development led by democratic institutions. MGNREGA is beneficial for the development of villages and it may be safely concluded that MGNREGA play a vital role in solving the problems of unemployment and poverty to a large extent. It has enhanced the purchasing power and raised the socio-economic status of people, especially of those who are unable to go far away in search of employment.

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