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Dimensions of MGNREGA and its impact on Rural livelihood in Haringhata Block of West Bengal, India

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Abstract
The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted to reinforce the commitment towards livelihood security in rural areas. The Act was notified on 7th September, 2005 and renamed as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October 2009. The MGNREGA is a law that aims to guarantee the 'right to work' and ensure livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The objective of the study was to identify the status of women empowerment through MGNREGA and to find out the contribution of MGNREGA in environmental sustainability and mitigation of health hazard. The study was conducted in Maliadanga and Dighalgram villages of Fatepur and Nagarukhra 2 gram panchayats, West Bengal, India respectively. 25 respondents from each village selected randomly. Total number of respondent for the study was 50. The two dependent variables i.e. Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) and Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) and 15 independent variables were selected for the study. The scheme has helped to enhance ecological security, environmental sustainability and migration of health hazards to a great extent. The MGNREGA has been designed to balance between human action and natural resource creating a sustainable economic security. Some constrains have also been identified in the scheme. It is evident from the present study that necessary steps should be taken by the implementing agencies for future improvements.

Keywords: MGNREGA, women empowerment, environment sustainability, rural employment, migration

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is considered as a "Silver Bullet" for eradicating rural poverty and unemployment, by way of generating demand for productive labour force in villages. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act It does so by drawing on lessons from past experience with wage employment programmes, in particular the Sampooma Grameen Rozgar Yojona (SGRY) (Yamini *et al.*, 2006) [1]. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005 and it was renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) on 2nd October, 2009 (Biswas *et al*, 2012) [2]. The implications of NREGS from minimum wage and employment point of view. Rural poverty and unemployment in India have grown in an unprecedented manner during the last few decades. MGNREGS should be further strengthened to ensure further increase in availability of employment, livelihood and security to rural poor, with special schemes to empower women. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and microfinance for the rural poor are the two sides of rural development (Kanungo *et al.*, 2012) [3]. The MGNREGA is committed to ensure that at least 33% of the worker shall be women (Arora *et al*, 2013) [4]. There is a growing incidence of illiteracy, blind faith, hungry people, malnourished children, anemic pregnant women, farmer suicides, starvation deaths, migration resulting from inadequate employment, poverty, and the failure of subsistence production during droughts. The MGNREGA is the flagship welfare programme of the UPA Government and the largest of its kind in India (Das *et al*, 2013) [5]. The NREGA addresses itself chiefly to working people and their fundamental right to live with dignity (Singh *et al*, 2013) [6]. In order to make solution of these problems and to provide livelihood security to rural unemployed, Government of India (GOI) enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005. It is the biggest poverty alleviation programme in the world which is started with an initial outlay of Rs. 11,300 crore in year 2006-07 and now it is Rs. 40,000 crore (2010-11).

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The information collected from MGNREGA beneficiaries indicated that most of them were engaged in works water conservation, water harvesting and forest nursery works (Dadabhau *et al*, 2013) [7]. This Act is now called as Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. NREGA has the potential to stimulate local development, if the management and delivery are good; and that women's weak position in the labour market has been greatly helped (Poonia *et al*, 2012) [8]. The Act provides a legal guarantee for 100 days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household will to do public work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. Thus it is a universal programme. This minimum wage varies from state to state, in some states it is Rs. 80 whereas in other it is Rs. 125 or Rs. 120. According to the Act the minimum wage cannot be less than Rs. 60. The 100 days of work figure was estimated because the agricultural season is only supposed to last roughly around 250 days and unskilled workers have no alternative source of income in the remaining parts of the year.

NREGA has come after almost 56 years of experience of other rural employment programmes, which include both Centrally Sponsored Schemes and those launched by State Govt. These comprise the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) 198089; Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) 1983-89; Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) 1989-1990; Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS)1993-99;

Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) 1999-2002; Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) from 2001; National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) from 2004 were national rural employment schemes. Among these, the SGRY and NFFWP have been merged with NREGA in 2005. Adult members of rural household willing to do unskilled manual work may apply for registration either in writing or orally to the Gram Panchayat (GP). The unit for registration is a household. Under the Act, each household is entitled to a 100 days of employment every year. After due verification of place of residence and age of the member/s (only adult members are eligible for employment); the registered household is issued a Job Card (JC). Job Card forms the basis of identification for demanding employment. A JC is to be issued within 15 days of registration. Each JC has a unique identification number. The demand for employment in the GP, or at block level has to be made against the JC number. Job Cards are also supposed to be updated with days of work and payment made to the beneficiary as and when the work is undertaken. A written application seeking work is to be made to the GP or Block Office, stating the time and duration for which work is sought. The GP will issue a dated receipt of the written application for employment, against which the guarantee of providing employment within 15 days operates. In case employment is not provided within 15 days, the state (as per the Act) will pay an unemployment allowance to the beneficiary. While allocating work, the below mentioned considerations are followed: Work is provided within 5 kilometres (kms) radius of the village. In case, work is provided beyond 5 kms, extra wages of 10 per cent are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses. Priority is awarded to women, such that at least one-third of the beneficiaries under the Scheme are women. At least 50 per cent of works, in terms of cost, are to be executed by the GPs. Wages are to be paid as per the State-wise Government of India (GoI) notified MGNREGA wages. Wages are also to be paid according to piece rate, as per the

Schedule of Rates. Payment of wages has to be done on a weekly basis and not beyond a fortnight in any case. Payment of wages is mandatorily done through the individual/joint bank/post office beneficiary accounts. Plans and decisions regarding the nature and choice of works to be undertaken in a FY along with the order in which each work is to be taken up, site selection, etc. are all to be made in open assemblies of the Gram Sabha (GS) and ratified by the GP. Works that are inserted at Block and District levels have to be approved and assigned a priority by the GS before administrative approval can be given. The GS may accept, amend or reject them. The GoI bears the 100 per cent wage cost of unskilled manual labour and 75 per cent of the material cost, including the wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers. To ensure that the workers are directly benefitted under the Scheme, the Act prohibits the use of contractors or machinery in execution of the works. To ensure that the spirit of the Act is not diluted and wage employment is the main focus, MGNREGA mandates that in the total cost of works undertaken in a GP, the wage expenditure to material expenditure ratio should be 60:40. Worksite facilities such as crèche, drinking water and shade have to be provided at all worksites Transparency and accountability in the programme is ensured through the following: Social Audit to scrutinize all the records and works under the Scheme are to be conducted regularly by the GS. Grievance redressed mechanisms and rules have to be put in place for ensuring a responsive implementation process. All accounts and records relating to the Scheme should be available for public scrutiny.

The study has been designed to focus on MGNREGA for environmental service- enhancement and vulnerability reduction. This helps in identifying several environmental effects that are caused by different works under MGNREGA and the improvements in the livelihood pattern of the rural people. The constraints that are experienced by the rural beneficiaries and suggestions for empowerment and further improvements will be of immense help for policy makers and i As the study has been conducted in the light of MGNREGA, the following specific objectives were taken into consideration for the present study To identify the status of women empowerment through MGNREGA and to find out the contribution of MGNREGA in environmental sustainability and mitigation of health hazard.

Research Methodology
Locale of Research
The villages namely Maliadanga and Dighalgram of the Haringhata block of Nadia district in West Bengal has purposively selected for the study. The area has been selected for the study because of the availability of appropriate respondents of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act for the present study. The profuse scope to get relevant information regarding income generation, women empowerment, existing environmental condition, MGNREGA's effect on environment management. The closure familiarities of the student researcher with the area, people, officials, and local dialects.

Sampling Technique
Purposive as well as simple random sampling techniques are adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique is adopted for the selection of the state and the district. This is because the area is ideal with respect to the problem, convenient for the researcher. In case of selection of block,

villages and respondents, simple random technique is taken up. The district Nadia under the state West Bengal was purposively selected. Nadia district consists of 17 blocks. Among these blocks Haringhata block was selected purposively. Haringhata block consists of total 10 gram panchayat samity. Among the gram panchayats Fatepur and Nagarukhra 2 gram panchayat were selected purposively. Again the village Maliadanga under Fatepur gram panchayat and Dighal Gram under Nagar Ukhra 2 gram panchayat was selected purposively. From the village Maliadanga 25 respondents were selected randomly and again from the village Dighal Gram another 25 respondents were selected randomly.

Pilot Study
Before the actual study a pilot study had been conducted to understand the areas, its people, institutions, the programme activities in the research area. The basic situational and background information had been collected during the period of pilot study.

Variables and their measurement
Several researchers pointed out that the behavior of an individual can be understood in depth if one has the knowledge of some variables. Appropriate measurements of the variables help the researcher to land upon the accurate conclusion. Therefore, the selected variables for the study had been measured in the following manner.

Independent Variables
Age (X_1)
In all societies, age is one of the most important determinants of social status and social role of the individual. In the present study age refers to the number of years the respondent live since birth at the time of investigation.

Education (X_2)
It refers to the respondents' ability to read and write and the amount of formal education i.e. academic attainment through formal schooling. To quantify the educational status of the respondents a scoring system has been used. The scoring system is as follows-Illiterate-(0), Read only-(1), Read and write-(2), Primary-(3), High School-(4),Graduate-(5)

Caste (X_3)
It is a system by which a society is divided into a number of self- contained and completely segregated units. The attribute caste has been measured as the caste category of the social system that is General, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. The scoring system is as follows-Scheduled Tribe-(1), Scheduled Caste-(2), General-(3)

Family Size(X_4)
Family size refers to the total number of members present in the respondent's family. In the present study the family having up to 4 members is considered as 'small' family and the family having 5 and above member is considered as 'large' family.

Land Holding (X_5)
It has been conceptualised as a measure of area of actual operational holding. It is therefore expected that respondent with larger holding would have higher involvement in various aspects relating to household, crop- livestock farming practices. Total land holding also indicate the socio-economic status of the MGNREGA beneficiaries. It was taken as the actual amount of land possessed by the respondent and was taken in terms of acre.

Adult Member (X_6)
It refers to the family members who are of 18 years or more years of age. As only the adult members of the family can apply for the works under MGNREGA, it is therefore expected that the more the adult member in the family, the more is the eligible person in the family for the works under MGNREGA. In The present study the family having up to 2 adult members, is considered as the family having less number of eligible person and the family having 3 and more adult members is considered as the family having more number of eligible person.

Family Education Status(X_7)
It refers to the academic attainment of the members of the respondent's family through formal schooling. The family education status is scored as follows: Low-(0 to 2), Medium-(above 2 to 4), High-(above 4).

$$\text{Index of Family Education Status} = \frac{Total\ educational\ score\ of\ the\ family}{Effective\ family\ size} \times 100$$

House Type(X_8)
The attribute house type has been referred to the house type of the respondent in the social system. It has been measured as follows: Hut-(1), Katcha House-(2), Mixed House-(3), Pucca House-(4).

Primary occupation (X_9)
It refers to the basic occupation of the respondent's family on which they depend mostly for maintaining their livelihood. The primary occupation has been divided into three categories i.e. Business, Farmer, Daily labour und others. The scores are as follows: Business- (3), Farmer-(2), Daily labour and others-(1).

Secondary Occupation (X_{10})
It refers to the occupation of the respondent in which he or she may involve in order to generate some extra income. The secondary occupation has been divided into four categories i.e. Business, MGNREGA beneficiary and others, Only MGNREGA beneficiary, Daily Labour. The weightage score are as follows-Business-(4), MGNREGA beneficiary and others-(3), Only MGNREGA beneficiary-(2), Daily Labour-(1).

Annual Income (X_{11})
The annual income of a person is an important parameter to assess the economic status of a person in the society. It refers to the total income of the respondent over the whole year. The weightage scores are as follows: Below25000-(1), 25000-50000-(2), above 50000-75000-(3), above 75000-(4).

Social Participation (X_{12})
Social participation is the social interaction process through which the involvement of an individual in any social organization or institution can be measured. In the present study it can be expected that if the social participation of the respondent is high then he will be more exposed to the works available under MGNREGA and its environmental issues.

Simultaneously women empowerment and their self-esteem will also be enhanced. Social Participation of the respondents has been quantified as follows- No Member-(0), Member of an organization-(1), Office Bearer in an organization-(2), Office Bearer of more than one organization-(3).

Extent of Participation (X_{13})
It refers to the degree to which the respondents are involved in different social organizations or institutions. The attribute 'Extent of Participation' is categorised as Never-(0), occasionally-(l), regularly-(2).

Material Possession (X_{14})
It refers to the possession of materials of the respondents. This attribute helps to show the livelihood standard of the respondents to some extent. The score range is obtained by adding the individual score of each material. The score range is as follows- Lower-1 to 5, Medium- 6 to 10, Higher- Above 10.

Communication Channel (X_{15})
The scientific operation needs the appropriate functioning of communication channel and appropriate mobilization of information received from communication channel. The score range is obtained by adding the score of each communication channel generally used by the respondents. Low-3 to 5, Medium-6 to 8, High- above 8

Thematic approaches to Rural Empowerment (Y_1)
It is an integral process of economic growth and social progress. It implies the development of rural sector which has many dimensions. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is land mark legislation for employment guarantee to the poor and weaker sections of our country. It is the special programme for livelihood support for the rural poor and vulnerable group.
It was measured by taking the views of despondence on different aspects like their knowledge about the work alloted and available, number of days they are getting jobs under MGNREGA, activities undertaken in MGNREGA in which they are involved, involvement of female members of their family etc.

The Index of Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment was calculated as
E.I. = (Perceived score / maximum score obtainable) X100%
Perceived score was obtained by adding the individual score of each aspect under the thematic approaches to rural empowerment.

Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2)
The ecological aspects is one of the best features of the MGNREGA as it designates a balance between human action and natural resources creating a sustainable economic security through green jobs. The MGNREGA activities still have the potential to provide environmental services, conserve and enhance natural resources (soil, water, grass and forest resources).
The variable was measured by taking the perception of the despondence on different aspects like the enrichment of the condition of soil, decreasing air and water pollution, better yield of fish due to pond renovation, better livestock rearing, strengthening ecological foundation through tree plantation, improving rural connectivity through rural road

reconstruction, prevention of soil erosion through the works under MGNREGA.

The index of Sustainable Environment Issues was calculated as-
E.I. = (Perceived Score/Maximum Score Obtainable) x 100%
Perceived score was obtained by adding the individual score of each aspect under the Sustainable Environment Issues.

V. Preparation of the Interview Schedule
A preliminary interview schedule was formed on the basis of the findings of the pilot study. The interview schedule was formed by the assistance of the Chairman, Advisory Committee and subsequent discussion with the members of the Advisory Committee. The interview schedule consisted of some major parts according to the specific objectives of the study. The scoring against each question was done after consulting with the officials of Fatepur and Nagar Ukhra 2 gram panchayats and the Nodal Officer of MGNREGA of Nadia district. The scoring was done by them because the panchayats have a principle role in planning and implementation of the programmes.

Pre-testing of the interview schedule
Before starting final data collection, entire schedule was pretested for elimination, addition and alternation.

Techniques of field data collection
Data were collected with the help of the structured interview schedule. The personal interview method was followed during the vacation. The questions were asked in Bengali so that the members could understand easily. The entries were done in the schedule by the student investigator himself at the time of interview.

Results and Discussion
Distribution of respondents based on the percentage of earning female members in the family (before MGNREGA
Table1 shows that before MGNREGA majority of the rural women (54%) were involved only in household activities. 32% were involved in farming activities along with household activities. Only 14% rural women were in different Self-Help Groups and other works like cottage industries, sewing etc

Table 1: Distribution of respondents based on the percentage of earning female members in the family (before MGNREGA

Serial Number	Category	Percentage (%)
1.	Only engaged in household activities	54
2.	Household activities and farming activities	32
3.	Member in SHGs or involved in other works	14

Distribution of respondents based on the percentage of earning female members in the family (after MGNREGA)
Table2 presents the distribution of respondents based on the percentage of earning female members in the family after introduction of MGNREGA in the village. The table reveals that 52% of the total rural women involved in different works under MGNREGA. Reason behind that MGNREGA provides work within the village periphery, so it is being easier for the rural women to work under MGNREGA. 19% of rural women are involved in farming activities along with household activities followed by 14% of the rural women are the

members of different Self-Help Group or involved in some other works and 15% are engaged only in household activities.

It is clearly seen from the above two table that MGNREGA helps rural women to engage in different works and earn by themselves which help in increasing their self-esteem and ultimately helps in women empowerment.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on the percentage of earning female members in the family (after MGNREGA)

Serial Number	Category	Percentage (%)
1.	Only engaged in household activities	15
2.	Household activities and farming activities	19
3.	Member in SHGs or involved in some other works	14
4.	Involved in works under MGNREGA	52

Distribution of the Respondents based on Problem towards the Role of MGNREGA in Sustainable Environment Management

Correlation coefficient of Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) with fifteen independent variables

Table3 presents the correlation coefficient of Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) with fifteen independent variables.

From the table it is clear that all fifteen independent variables are significantly correlated with the thematic approaches to rural empowerment.

Table 3: Correlation coefficient of Thematic Approaches to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) with fifteen independent variables

Variables (X)	Coefficient of Correlation (r)
Age (X_1)	0.889**
Education (X_2)	0.944**
Caste (X_3)	-0.710**
Family Size (X_4)	0.839**
Land Holding (X_5)	0.834**
Adult Member (X_6)	0.812**
Family Education Status (X_7)	0.745**
House Type (X_8)	0.875**
Primary Occupation (X_9)	-0.869**
Secondary Occupation (X_{10})	-0.819**
Annual Income (X_{11})	0.768**
Social Participation (X_{12})	0.818**
Extent of Participation (X_{13})	0.705**
Material Possession (X_{14})	0.758**
Communication Channel (X_{15})	0.710**

**Significant at 0.01 level of significance

Step-down Regression Analysis of Thematic to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) with respect to fifteen Independent Variables

Table4. represents the step down regression analysis and it has been found that the 5 different causal variables i.e. Age, Caste, Adult Member, Secondary Occupation and Education have been found to regress predominantly on the dependent variable Thematic Approaches and the R^2 value has been found 95.50%.

So, these 5 variables in order of relevance and proficiency have got most contribution on Thematic Approaches of MGNREGA. The respondents having young age, higher caste affiliation, better institutional relationship and higher

education can develop better thematic approaches to MGNREGA otherwise if we want scale up efficacy of performance of MGNREGA respondents having all the traits can be given higher priority.

Table 4: Step-down Regression Analysis of Thematic to Rural Empowerment (Y_1) with respect to fifteen Independent Variables

Model	Variables Entered	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1.	Education	0.891	0.889	2.00783
2.	Secondary Occupation	0.938	0.935	1.53513
3.	Adult Member	0.944	0.941	1.46569
4.	Caste	0.951	0.946	1.39754
5.	Age	0.955	0.950	1.34606

Correlation coefficient of Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) with fifteen independent variables

Table5 present the correlation coefficient of Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) fifteen Independent Variables. From the above table it is seen that the correlation coefficient between Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) and the fifteen variables are significant.

Table 5: Correlation coefficient of Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) with fifteen independent variables

Variables (X)	Coefficient of Correlation (r)
Age (X_1)	0.926**
Education (X_2)	0.949**
Caste (X_3)	-0.672**
Family Size (X_4)	0.894**
Land Holding (X_5)	0.864**
Adult Learning (X_6)	0.812**
Family Education Status (X_7)	0.773**
House Type (X_8)	0.917**
Primary Occupation (X_9)	-0.903**
Secondary Occupation (X_{10})	-0.813**
Annual Income (X_{11})	0.833**
Social Participation (X_{12})	0.836**
Extent of Participation (X_{13})	0.720**
Material Possession (X_{14})	0.795**
Communication Channel (X_{15})	0.775**
**Significant at 0.01 level of significance	

Step-down Regression Analysis of Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) with respect to fifteen Independent Variables

Table6. represents the step down regression analysis and it has been found that the different causal variables i.e. Education, Secondary Occupation, Family Size, Age, Adult Member, Caste, Annual income and Material Possession have been found to regress predominantly on the dependent variable Sustainable Environment Issues and the R^2 value 99.00%.

So, this eight variable in order of relevance and proficiency have got most important contribution on sustainable environment issues of MGNREGA.

The respondents having higher education, young age, higher caste affiliation and lower income can develop a better sustainable environment issues to MGNREGA otherwise if we wanted scale up efficacy of performance of MGNREGA respondents having all the traits can be given higher priority.

Table 6: Step-down Regression Analysis of Sustainable Environment Issues (Y_2) with respect to fifteen Independent Variables

Model	Variables Entered	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate
1.	Education	0.900	0.898	3.26993
2.	Secondary Occupation	0.941	0.938	2.54241
3.	Family Size	0.969	0.967	1.84993
4.	Age	0.978	0.976	1.59121
5.	Adult Member	0.983	0.981	1.39278
6.	Caste	0.985	0.983	1.32331
7.	Annual Income	0.988	0.986	1.20112
8.	Material Possession	0.990	0.988	1.13947

Conclusion

From the analysis it is concluded that the performance of MGNREGA in Haringhata block is satisfactory. Age, Caste, Adult Member, Secondary Occupation and Education have much contribution on rural development. The younger generations are well aware about the work available in the villages. Wages are paid on the basis of work measurement and there is no time bound attendance on worksite which facilitates the rural women to work according to their suitability during lean hours in a day and days unemployed elsewhere in a year accordingly. Due to this opportunity, the rural women are able to contribute their earning to run their family. This increases their self esteem. Another important problem is seasonal migration. The rural people generally migrate to urban areas in search of better job opportunity. MGNREGA provides work within the village periphery which helps to prevent migration to some extent. If more work is given under MGNREGA, it is possible to prevent the seasonal migration fully. Regarding the sustainable environmental issues, MGNREGA help to strengthen ecological foundation by forestation and tree plantation. It improves the rural connectivity to urban areas removing the sense of isolation remote villages. The work like pond excavation and renovation of traditional water bodies help to prevent water pollution.

MGNREGA aims to achieve the objective as enunciated in the Article: 41 of the Indian Constitution- "giving citizens the right to work". The Act is significant due to the following reasons: While the earlier wage employment programmes did not provide any guarantee of job, this Act provided guaranteed job. This guarantee for wage employment is now uniformed all over the country like never before. It is a development initiative, chipping in with essential public investment for creation of durable assets, without which the growth process can't be possible in the most backward regions of rural India. Almost all the previous programmes were allocation based rather than demand based. NREGA, which was launched in 2006, is considered to be unique from this stand point. The key element of MGNREGA is the provision of employment by the state to those people who are unable to find alternative employment, which provides a form of social safety net to the rural unemployment people. In other wage employment programmes, anyone can be engaged as labour while in MGNREGA only job card holders that apply for employment can be engaged as labourers. There is no time frame in other wage employment programmes but in MGNREGA, employment will be given within 15 days of demand, payment also within 15 days of work. In other wage employment programme the duration of employment is dependent on duration of work by implementing agency while in MGNREGA, a job card holder applies for maximum 100 days. The other key attributes of this Act are labour-intensive work, decentralized participatory planning, women's empowerment, work-site facilities and above all transparency and accountability through the provision of social audits and right to information. The use of information technology in this programme is considered to bring about greater transparency through intensive monitoring and faster execution. The payment of wages through bank and post office accounts is other innovative step that is likely to reduce fudging of muster rolls on the part of the implementing agencies since the actual payments are beyond their reach. Thus MGNREGA is not only a welfare initiative but also a development effort that can take the Indian economy to a new prosperity.

Competing Interest

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration with all authors. Author Subhajit Roy wrote the first draft of the manuscript, collected data and done statistical analysis. Author Arindam Ghosh helped in collection of data and preparation of manuscript, author Monirul Haque helped in interpretation and supervised the work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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