



ISSN (E): 2277- 7695
ISSN (P): 2349-8242
NAAS Rating: 5.23
TPI 2022; SP-11(3): 1494-1497
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www.thepharmajournal.com
Received: 09-01-2022
Accepted: 12-02-2022

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Constraints faced by officials of Mahatma Gandhi national rural employment guarantee Act

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is the largest rights-based social protection initiative, provide basic income assurance to a large number of beneficiaries. In this sense the scheme is the flagship programme of the Government of India as it provides statutory right to employment to every rural household in a financial year. The present study was conducted in Panamarathupatty block of Salem district. In this block, five major revenue villages viz., Kammalapatti, Kuralnatham, Nazhikkalpatti, Thumbalpatti and Vazhakkuttapatti were selected with the background of more worksite participation of beneficiaries in MGNREGA work. Ten officials were selected randomly from each village, thus comprising 50 officials. The constraints were ranked by Henry Garrett ranking technique. It was found that the major constraint faced by the officials were lack of timely training, non-availability & delay in release of funds in time, lack of technical facilities.

Keywords: Employment, flagship programme, technical facilities

Introduction

Employment in the *Rabi* season too is very low since only a few farmers undertake cultivation in this season. Very few workers show little willingness to work in *Rabi* crops because of the high level of drudgery involved in these tasks in spite of *Rabi* wages being higher than kharif wages. So there is a long spell of agricultural inactivity after the kharif season which generally gets over in October. In 2006, India embarked on an ambitious attempt to fight rural poverty, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 created a justiciable, right to work for all households in rural India through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, renamed the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in 2009. MGNREGA is regarded as the largest public employment programme in the world, assures 100 days of work per year to all rural households, whose adults are willing to do unskilled manual labor at the statutory minimum wage notified for the program. The most direct and obvious way is by providing extra employment to the rural household and income to the poorest in rural areas. Although the focus is on augmenting wage employment for unskilled labour, it is ambitious in scope and aims to accomplish a number of things. The act envisages, for instance, that the works undertaken will strengthen natural resource management and address causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation, and soil erosion, thereby encouraging sustainable development. MGNREGA is a universal public works programme, but it has a strong underlying targeting mechanism because entry into the programme is by self-selection. Self-selection could affect the take-up of the programme and in turn influence labour market dynamics. The Government of India has made a massive financial commitment to this programme. The MGNREGA scheme has high expectations in terms of employment generation, food security, halting migration, alleviation of poverty and overall rural development (Ghosh. J.K, 2011) [2]. It has neither been claimed nor was envisaged that MGNREGA is the key to successful rejuvenation of rural areas of the country that have remained marginalized in the growth process of the country (Thomas, B. and Bhatia, R., 2012) [7]. The massive numbers of works being undertaken in rural areas have the potential to not only transform the rural economy but also its environment. As quoted by the then Minister for Rural Development, “the Ministry of Rural Development’s (MoRD) Schemes have an immense potential to contribute to the goal of sustainable poverty reduction and efficient use of natural resources, including improved land use planning and management practices” (Shah *et al.* 2012) [4]. A decade after coming into force, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is suffering from a decline in employment, budget caps, delays in wage payments and rampant violations of workers' entitlements.

Hence, this study was envisaged to know the constraints encountered by officials of MGNREGA.

Methodology

For this study, Panamarathupatty block in Salem district has been selected and the Probability sampling was used for the selection of villages. In this block, five major revenue villages viz., Kammalapatti, Kuralnatham, Nazhikkalpatti,

Thumbalpatti and Vazhakkuttapatti were selected with the background of more worksite participation of beneficiaries in MGNREGA work. With this regard, 10 officilas from each village have been selected based on simple random sampling method, thus comprise the sample size of 50 officials. The number of officilas for each of the selected villages was chosen by simple random sampling method. The village wise Beneficiaries' details for the study were furnished in Table 1.

Table 1: Selection of study area and respondents

District	Block	Villages	Sample
Salem	Panamarathupatty	Kammalapatti	10
		Kuralnatham	10
		Nazhikkalpatti	10
		Thumbalpatti	10
		Vazhakkuttapatti	10
Total			50

The ex post facto research design was used for the study, thus the researcher has no scope in manipulation of independent variables, as these have already occurred and have been studied. The respondents were put forth with constraints and asked to rank on the basis of their importance. Henry Garret ranking method was used to rank the constraints.

Analytical tool

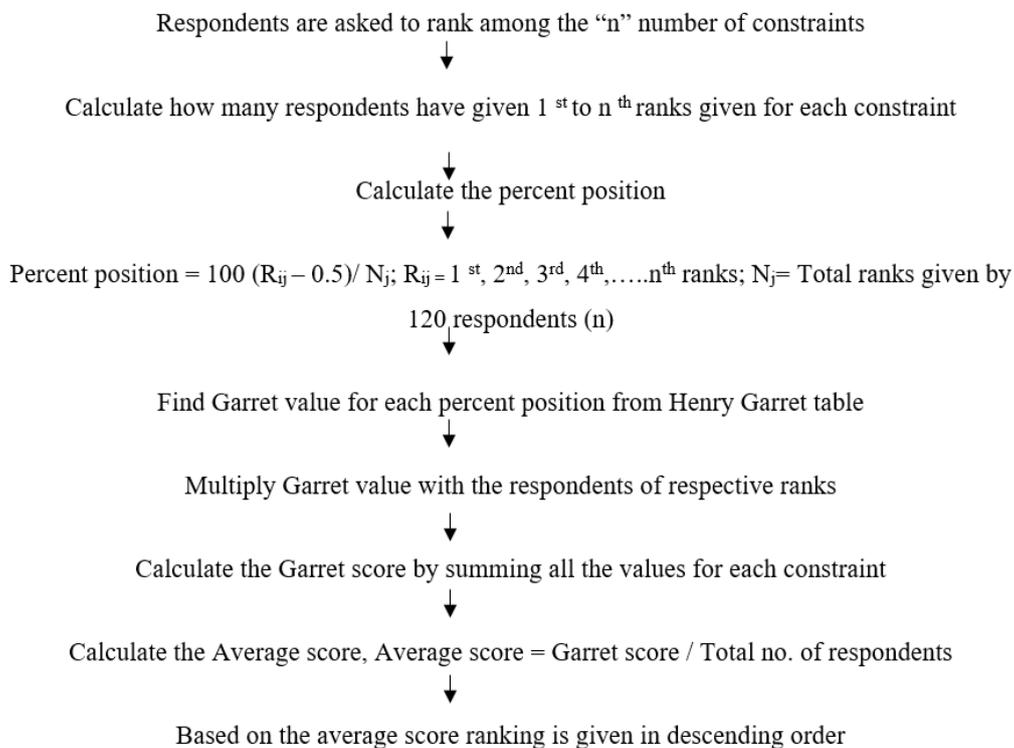
Constraints documented by officilas will be shown to them and asked to rank those constraints from their view point. Each constraint will be given a rank. Garrett's ranking provides the score for constraints and advantages. The main advantage of this technique over simple frequency distribution is that the constraints are decided based on their seriousness from the point of view of respondents Garrett's

formula for converting ranks into percent is:

$$\text{Percent position} = 100 * (R_{ij} - 0.5) / N_j$$

Where, R_{ij} = rank given for i th constraint by j th individual;
 N_j = number of constraints ranked by j th individual.
 The per cent position of each rank will be converted into scores with the help of the table given by Garrett and Woodworth (1969). For each constraint, the scores of individual respondents will be added together and divided by the total number of the respondents. These mean scores for all the constraints will be arranged in descending order; the constraints will be accordingly ranked.

Steps involved in Henry Garrett ranking



The respondents were asked to rank the ten constraints identified as 1, 2, 3, 410 in order to know their preference in the selection of constraint. The calculated percentage position for the rank 1, 2, 3,.....10 and their correspondent

Garrett table. For constraints, the total score is calculated by multiplying the number of respondents ranking that constraint as 1, 2, 3,,,,,, and 10.

Table 2: Percent positions and their corresponding Garrett value

Rank	Percent Position Value= $100 * (R_{ij} - 0.5) / N_j$	Garrett value
1	$100(1-0.5)/10$	5
2	$100(2-0.5)/10$	15
3	$100(3-0.5)/10$	25
4	$100(4-0.5)/10$	35
5	$100(5-0.5)/10$	45
6	$100(6-0.5)/10$	55
7	$100(7-0.5)/10$	65
8	$100(8-0.5)/10$	75
9	$100(9-0.5)/10$	85
10	$100(10-0.5)/10$	95

Findings and Discussion

Table 3: Ranking of constraints faced by officials of MGNREGA

S. No.	Constraints faced by officials	Total	Average score	Garrett Rank
1.	Lack of timely training	2426.50	48.53	7
2.	Non-availability of staff on contract basis	2699.00	53.98	5
3.	Non-availability and delay in release of funds in time	3291.00	65.82	2
4.	More and weak documentation works	2591.00	51.82	6
5.	Delay in payment of wages to the workers	2832.50	56.65	4
6.	Illiteracy of the people	3309.00	66.18	1
7.	Under payment of salaries to MGNREGS staff	2310.50	46.21	8
8.	Lack of co-operation from people's groups and social organization's	2267.50	45.35	10
9.	Lack of technical facilities	3179.00	63.58	3
10.	Collection of fine for bogus registration on par with unemployment allowance	2273.00	45.46	9

From the table 3, it is clear that major constraint faced by the officials were illiteracy of people with an average score of 66.18. This might be due to insistence on transparency in MGNREGS and non-willingness of these people to improve their living standards.

The second major constraint encountered by the officials were non-availability and delay in release of funds in time with an average score of 65.82. Over and above, Stina *et al.* (2015) was also indicative of this constraint as the average annual income contributed from MGNREGA was found to be ₹1270/- only while the maximum earning achievable was ₹19000/- per year. According to the MGNREGA guidelines, wages are to be paid according to the Minimum Wages Act 1948, and the payments for the work should be made within two weeks of the completion of the work. Delay in payment of wages to workers was found to be the fourth major constraint with an average score of 56.65. However, delay/late in payment and underpayments were common problems under MGNREGA. The problem was also reported by Feroze *et al.* (2012) ^[1] and Singh (2012). This delay can be two to three months, most commonly, and sometimes it takes five to six months to get the payment under MGNREGA. Moreover, the wages reported to be received by the beneficiaries were less than the wage rate fixed under MGNREGA as also highlighted by Techi and Sharma (2014) ^[6] and Khawlneikim and Mital (2015). These issues related to the payment of wages pose a significant threat to the programme in achieving livelihood security. As per the reports from the functionaries, scarcity of funds was the most hampering constraint as the labor budget prepared based on the number of job card holders prevailing in the area was not accepted by the central government, which sequentially leads to failure in providing 100 days of works.

Lack of technical facilities was the third major constraint faced by the officials with an average score of 63.58. This might be due to revelry of MGNREGS conceived. Institute of Applied Manpower Research (2008) also has mentioned

issues like procedural flaws in technical estimates, the extent of autonomy in planning processes, and delay in procedures and processes. Failing to update and upload MIS report timely was also the main obstacle in achieving the desired performance of MGNREGA. Since the government accepts the labor budget and sanction funds based on the reports uploaded in MIS. Delay in data collection and tabulation, improper availability of internet facilities, inability to handle data and advance sophisticated Technology etc. might be some of the probable reasons as the training needed on maintenance of various records, MIS, MMS etc. Due to more minor Information Education Communication (IEC)/awareness campaign, various rights and duties bestowed for the beneficiary were not known, and thus level of accessibility, better functioning, and efficient employment was fewer. As a result technical facilities have to be improved to the officials.

Delay in payment of wages to the workers was the fourth major constraint with an average score of 56.65. This might be due to complicated procedural norms. Despite claims of timely payment of MGNREGA wages, a study by Sanjeeb Mukherjee (2021) has shown that wage payments were delayed for 71 per cent of the transactions beyond the mandated seven days, 44 per cent of the transactions beyond the mandated 15 days and 14 per cent of the transactions beyond the mandated 30 days. The study was conducted on about 1.8 million transactions between April 2021 and September 2021 by randomly sampling 10 percent of the Fund Transfer Orders (FTOs) from one block per district per state for 10 states. It was conducted by LibTech India and the People's Action for Employment Guarantee (PAEG).

Non-availability of staff on contract basis (53.98) might be due to low salaries, need to stay in villages and no certainty of its continuation. More and weak documentation (51.82) might be due to the lot of time it is consuming in subjecting them to mental agony. Lack of timely training (48.53) might be due to paucity of experienced staff to train them. Under payment of

salaries to MGNREGS staff (46.21) might be due to less amount of funds available towards administrative cost. Collection of fine for bogus registration on par with unemployment allowance (45.46) might be due to lack of proper supervision. Lack of co-operation from people's groups and social organization's (45.35) might be due to public outlook as this is being a government scheme.

Conclusion

The study concluded that there is an urgent need of identifying some more important factors which might be more helpful to implementing agencies in facilitating the good impact of this type of national level scheme/programme. Measures have to be taken to improve the literacy of the people and steps have to be taken to give proper information about MGNREGA to illiterate people. Disbursement of funds have to be channelized in order to improve the functionality of MGNREGA.

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