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People's Participation under MGNREGS: The Case of Khuangleng Village under Champhai District, Mizoram

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ABSTRACT

The success and failure of rural development programmes rest upon people's participation. This recognition has brought about a paradigm shift in understanding the stance of people in development, from working *for* people to working *with* people. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is one such programme implemented by the Government of India that place people at the centre of development. Apart from employment generation and development work, it has inbuilt mechanism to induce people's participation in such a manner that people may own it. The scheme provides a scope for people to participate right from its implementation stage to the execution of work and thereafter through concurrent social audit. It is on this light, this paper attempts to understand people's participation at various stages of the implementation of MGNREGS in Khuangleng village, which comes under Khawbung rural development block, Champlain District of Mizoram. It is seen that in spite of the scope for people to participate actively at various stages of implementation, participation is seen mostly during the execution of work. This in turn hamper the realisation of the true potentials of MGNREGS which intends to empower people, by creating a platform for people to plan, implement, and execute work for their own development. The paper concludes with the need to create awareness among different stakeholders to facilitate greater pro-active participation of the people.

KEYWORDS: Employment, Rural Development, MGNREGS, Mizoram, Participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Anti-poverty strategies have been in operation for several years targeting the twin problems of unemployment and poverty. Wage employment in India began with the implementation of National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) during the 80's. Since then, various other wage employment programmes like Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme(RLEGP) 1983-89, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY) 1989-99, Employment Assurance Scheme(EAS) 1993-99, Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY)1999-2002, Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana 2001(SGRY) and National Food for Work Programme(NFFWP)2004, have been implemented. SGRY and NFFWP were later merged under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme¹.The NREGS was introduced in 2005 and later renamed as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), which herald the largest wage employment ever in the history of India's wage employment programmes and one of the largest rural employment scheme of the world^{2,3}.

Over the past foray of rural development programmes, development works were carried out for people and not with the people. This had led to underutilisation of people's knowledge and experience on the problems they encounter in their local environment and possible ways of getting out of them⁴. As Chamber 2013⁵put forth ' spread –and take up' programmes were pushes to people in a centralised manner that failed to recognised the knowledge and experience of rural people. The Working Group on District Planning 1984 and G.V.K Rao Committee1985 recognised and recommended the need to create good governance, and institutional structure that will enable people to participate and own the scheme⁶. Since rural development primarily target to uplift the welfare of its people, participation of people is of utmost importance. In response to this, emphasis has been given to broaden the scope for people to participate in the planning and decision making of developmental programmes. It is on this light the paper attempts to understand people's participation under MGNREGS in Khuangleng Village of Mizoram.

Salient features of MGNREGA

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)governs the implementation of the scheme. It placed a legality to provide 100 days guarantee employment to rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. MGNREGA marked a paradigm shift from earlier programmes in being a right based approach, demand driven, along with the adoption of bottom up approach. The bottom up approach adopted in the scheme placed people's at the centre of development. Right from the selection of work, implementation and execution of works and post implementation is placed at the hand of the people. The demand for employment acts as a triggering point for the scheme to commence off. The Act also stipulate the conduct of

concurrent social audit to usher in transparency and accountability, providing a voice to the people in the ways and measures the scheme is implemented. The centrality of the scheme is therefore, to usher development by securing the livelihood of the people and empowered the people through its participatory approach. It is therefore, crucial that people are aware of their rights and entitlements, and participate fully to own the scheme.

The scheme also incorporated worksite facilities for workers to encourage participation and provide for a crèche for women with children. Some of the other work site facilities to be provided as enshrined under the Act are:

- 1) Safe drinking water
- 2) Period of rest and shade for taking rest
- 3) First aid kit for emergency

Another innovative feature of the Act lies in ensuring transparency and accountability with provision like social audit, Right to Information(RTI), proactive disclosure at gram panchayat. The management information system(MIS), NREGA soft provides real time information on the scheme. Workers under the scheme are also entitled to claim unemployment allowance in case work is not provided within fifteen days from the date of registration of demand for work or from the date for which work has been demanded in case of advance application. This placed the implementing agency to act proactively to create employment for the demand of work by job card holders.

Objectives of MGNREGS

The primary objective of MGNREGS is to secure the livelihood of rural areas by providing hundred days guarantee employment to all adult members willing to do manual unskilled labour. It also aims to create durable asset thereby enhancing the livelihood base of the people. The scheme also delineates the critical time to demand for employment, when there is scarcity of employment opportunities in a village. As such, it aims to tackle not only seasonal unemployment but also to enhance infrastructure development, augment resource base of the people and reduce rural- urban migration.

People's participation and rural development

The World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) held at Rome in 1979 marked an important milestone for people's participation in rural development. The conference recognised participation of people in the institutions that governs their lives as 'basic human right'⁷. In India, the development efforts during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was based on top down service delivery with emphasis given on a centralized delivery system. This in a way could not trickle down the intended benefits to the people. On account of the failure of trickle down growth model, the concept of people's participation takes precedence during the Tenth Plan of India in

response to the growing realization of its importance. It saw a thrust towards decentralization and people's participation. It recognised people's participation as a key element in the process of development by promoting participatory institutions like panchayats, cooperatives, and self-help groups. The 73rd Amendment gave impetus for people's participation and institutional structure for implementation of development schemes through its three tier system. However, past review of India's efforts in involving people through PRIs has not met with desired results⁸. With the implementation of MGNREGS in 2006, it saw a departure from earlier wage employment schemes. The Act (MGNREG Act, 2005) became an important legislative landmark in the history of rural development in India with provision for bottom up approach, right based programme with rights and entitlements to safeguard, and above all deviating from earlier approach of supply driven model. According to UNDP 2010⁹ MGNREGA historic achievement lies in enhancing governance at grass root with provisions for transparency and accountability mechanisms.

MGNREGA was implemented on the backdrop to tackle twin objectives of securing livelihood of rural people through generation of employment and to secure livelihood base of the people by creating durable assets. It was implemented initially in 200 districts of India and later rolled out to the rest of the districts. According to MORD report 2016² since its implementation it has generated more employment for the rural poor than any other programmes in the history of independent India. Panda, Dutta and Prusty 2009¹⁰ appraisal of NREGA in the States of Meghalaya and Sikkim conclude that MGNREGS has provide workers with not just employment but also improved food and nutrition consumption. Studies by Mohanty 2012¹¹ Ralte 2012¹², Gandhi ram Rural Institute 2010¹³, Institute of Applied Manpower Research 2009¹⁴, show a similar findings that MGNREGS has been able to increase income and improved the living standard of rural households. Despite the contribution made by MGNREGS, in some instances it fail to ensure proactive participation of people at the grass root level. Studies by Chhetri 2013⁷ and Xavier and Mari 2014¹⁵ indicates factors such as poor worksite facilities, climate, lack of leisure and prevailing socio factors such as educational status, class, income and politico- cultural factors that hinder people's participation.

METHODOLOGY

Mizoram erstwhile Lushai Hills is located on the southernmost tip of the north eastern region. Mizoram occupies an area of great strategic importance. It is flanked by Bangladesh to the west and Myanmar to the east and south. It also shares its borders with three Indian states – Assam, Tripura and Manipur. For administrative purpose Mizoram is divided into 8 districts viz., Aizawl, Mamit, Champhai, Kolasib, Saiha, Lunglei, Lawngtlai and Serchhip. Champhai District is located in the southern part of Mizoram which share its boundary with Myanmar. For administrative purpose

Champhai District is divided into 4 rural development blocks, namely Khawbung RD Block, Champhai RD Block, Khawzawl RD Block and Ngopa RD, with administrative headquarters situated at Champhai town. Under Khawbung RD Blocks there are 25 Gram Panchayats under which Khuangleng village the study area is located.

There are 520 registered household with Job Card holders in Khuangleng village as per MIS generated 2016-2017 report for Mizoram State (see <http://nrega.nic.in/MISreport.htm>). Khuangleng village is selected purposely for the study and a through random sampling 253 respondents were identified, and a structure interview schedule was administered to one adult member of a household who is a registered job card holder. The collected data were tabulated and analysed with the help of excel and SPSS Package

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio economic profile

From table no 1 it is seen that agriculture is the mainstay of the village with 94 % of the respondents are directly engaged as cultivators and only few respondents(4%) are engaged inactivities other than agriculture and allied activities. Among the respondents, majority belongs to Mizo tribe (99%) and only 1% belongsto Chakma community. Christianity (99%) is the major type of religion among the respondents while only 1%professedBuddhism. The Chakma are Buddhistmostly. Regarding type of family, nuclear family is found to be dominant with 70 % and only 30% are in joint family.

Table No.1 : Socio economic profile

Sl No	Characteristics	Total N= 253
1	Occupation	
	Cultivator	238(94)
	Agriculture Labourer	3(1)
	Others	12(4)
2	Socio Economic Category	
	APL	95(36)
	BPL	121(48)
	AAV	37(15)
3	Social Profile	
	Mizo	250(99)
	Chakma	3(1)
4	Religion	
	Christianity	250(99)
	Buddhist	3(1)
5	Type of Family	
	Nuclear	178(70)
	Joint	75(30)

Source computed. Figures in parentheses are percentage

Table No.2 : Demographic profile

Sl No	Characteristic	Total N=253
1	Age Group	
	Youth(18-35)	51 (20)
	Middle (35-60)	158 (62)
	Elderly(60 and Above)	44 (17)
	Mean Age	47.8 ±13.8
2	Gender	
	Male	179 (70)
	Female	74 (29)
3	Marital Status	
	Married	217 (86)
	Unmarried	1 (0.3)
	Divorce	3 (1)
	Widowed	32 (13)
4	Educational Status	
	Illiterate	9 (4)
	Primary (1-5)	107 (42)
	Middle (6-8)	83 (33)
	Secondary (9-10)	46 (18)
	Higher Secondary (11-12)	4 (2)
	Higher Education (13 and above)	4 (2)

Source computed. Figures in parentheses are percentage

Demographic profile

Demographic represent the grouping of people into different segment which mainly include age, marital status, gender and educational status(see table 2). Majority of the respondents falls under middle age group (35-60) at 62%, follow by youth(18-35) at 20%, and above 60 years constituted 17%. On the whole, the mean age (48) reveals that MGNREGS attract mostly those who have well past their age of career building and have settle down in life. This is supported by respondents' marital status where majority (86%) are found to be married. Gender is another important dimension that regulates and structure social relation between men and women and which display power dynamics. The study found that male respondents (70%) constituted higher proportion than female (29%). In terms of educational status, almost half of the respondents attained till primary

level of education (42%), followed by middle school (33%), secondary education (18%), illiterate (4%), both higher secondary and higher education constituted at (2%) each.

People’s participation during different stages of implementation

MGNREGS provide for people to proactively participate in different stages of its implementation. Firstly, MGNREGS provide a bottom up planning, where people could plan and identify works for their own development which is in acknowledgement that people knows best their needs and requirement. Secondly, during the execution of work. Besides ,the provision for concurrent social audit followed by public hearing are embedded to enable people to proactively participate. Table 3 indicates participation is highest during execution of work (87%) this further shows the nature of people participation, mostly as workers. During the selection and identification of work, participation is abysmally low at 9% only while non participation is at a staggering91 %. The non-participation of people in the selection of work indicates people needs to be educated about the Scheme, on the rights and entitlement of workers , and on the provisions of the scheme. Even during social audit people’s participation is extremely low at 7 % only. The proactive participation of people at different stages of implementation is important in order to reap the potentials and benefits protected under MGNREGS. In terms of people’s participation under MGNREGS among Khuangleng village, it is seen that participation is mostly only at the level of passive participation.

Table No 3: People’s Participation during Different Stages of MGNREGS Implementation

SI No	Characteristics	Total N=253
I	Selection of Work	
	No	229 (91)
	Yes	24 (9)
II	Execution of Work	
	No	33 (13)
	Yes	220 (87)
III	Social Audit	
	No	235 (93)
	Yes	18 (7)

Source Computed figures in parenthesis indicate percentage

CONCLUSION

The provisions under the MGNREG Act envision to secure livelihood and augment resource base of the people through active participation of the people. It ushers a new paradigm shift from the earlier wage scheme in being a demand driven, bottom up approach, with legal provision of 100 days guarantee employment. MGNREGS attract mainly adults who have attained the age of 35 and above. The youth are seen to be less interested to do manual labour. Further research can be done to understand the subjective nature of people's participation on different age groups. Despite its provisions and potentials to emphasise on people's participation, it is seen that people's participation is passive and their involvement under MGNREGS is maximum only during work execution. Participation during pre and post implementation process needs to be encouraged more as these levels provide scope for empowering people to plan for their own development and own the scheme through social audit. Active participation in all stages of MGNREGS is of utmost importance to facilitate a new paradigm shift, of ushering bottom up approach along with right based demand driven derailing from earlier supply driven beneficiary model. As lack of people's participation could defeat the principles on which MGNREGS stand, and this calls for ensuring greater awareness on the potentials of MGNREGS at different levels of stakeholders.

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