



MGNREGA AND ITS IMPACT ON DECENT AND GREEN JOBS: AN OVERVIEW

Jhumur Samaddar

Ph.D, Research Scholar,
Dept. of Economics, Ranchi University

Jyoti Prakash

Assistant Professor,
Department of Economics, Ranchi University

In a democratic country like India, where majority of the population resides in rural areas, gainful employment needs to be an enforceable legal entitlement. Every citizen of India has the right to work and it becomes the duty of the government to make constructive efforts in this direction. In today's date, not only does government needs to provide work, but also needs to provide work which is economically sustainable and fulfils the parameters of decent work as specified by many international agencies, this paper deals with the work of research scholars, educators, international agencies and NGOs who have previously researched in this area. This programme highlights the various aspects, problems and strategies adopted by MGNREGA in the field of green and decent jobs. Most of the thoughts on decent jobs and green jobs have been expressed by international scholars as this is still a new and emerging field in India.

Keywords: Rural Employment, Decent Work.

INTRODUCTION

MGNREGA has been a flagship programme of the Indian Government, which has been acclaimed worldwide for its innovative approach in providing gainful rural employment and having a dual effect of creation of green and decent jobs. The potential of creating green jobs in agriculture can lead to social economic and environmental sustainability, and lead to a greener environment.

According to United Nations Environment Programme, green jobs have been defined as 'work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development, administrative, and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving and restoring environmental quality.' Some indicators of green jobs are protection of ecosystems, creating green public works and enforcing environmental laws, on the other hand, decent jobs involve opportunities for work that is fair and productive, provides security in workplace, and gives people the right to voice their concerns. The various studies show that these two aspects have not been studied in great detail under MGNREGA and hence their actual impact is unclear.

Decent Jobs and Green Jobs

Singh, A. (2014) observed that MGNREGA has done a commendable job in generating durable national assets in deprived rural areas, which have had many environmental benefits as well as leading to reduced vulnerability to climate change. In Uttarakhand, these works have helped in enhancing adaptability and resilience power of people who have faced natural and environmental disasters every year. But, it has been seen that the performance of MGNREGA has been steadily declining and has failed to maintain continuity. There has been

a continuous decline in asset creation and expenditure of works. There has to be more focus on environmental implications of MGNREGA and finding the causes of this declining trend and determining how this trend can be reversed.

Deogharia, Prakash Chandra (2014) found Employment Guarantee Programmes (EGP) have been successfully used by developed countries to ensure livelihood to the poorer sections of society for formation of Human Capital, but when MGNREGA entered its seventh year of implementation, certain questions were asked. Experts felt that MGNREGA should draw more from the successful EGPs from countries like South Africa and Argentina. These programmes have been successful in empowering the rural poor in these countries. In India, the problem lies in the implementation of the brilliant programme MGNREGA, which has a huge potential.

Sudha Narayan, Krishna Ranaware, Upasale Das and Ashwin Kulkarni (2014) in their paper titled 'MGNREGA Works and their Impacts- A Rapid Assessment in Maharashtra' worked with two goals in mind- first, to verify the existence of assets and second, to assess the problems and benefits associated with these assets. The survey found that 87% of the works exist and over 75% of them were directly related to agriculture. The rural people needed to play a key role in deciding the kind of asset to be created as it should be need-based and useful in the long term. Systematic participation and suggestions of the villagers in the decision about location of assets and time of implementation should be encouraged in this respect.

Nagraja J and et.al (2018) emphasised that according to the Planning Commission, poverty in India has greatly reduced during the period of 1973 to 2010, but still the country faces mass poverty even after the Eleventh Five Year Plan has been completed. The trickle-down effect to reach the rural poor through the various programmes and policies of the government, has remained largely unsuccessful. The Ministry of Rural Development in India envisions a sustainable and inclusive growth of Rural India where there is an increase in the livelihood opportunities and living standard of the poor people. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is one such flagship programme of the government in this direction. He stressed that this programme will be groundbreaking in creating productive employment to the majority of poor residing in rural areas. The rural poor mainly work as unskilled and manual labour.

Dutta, Puja & Murgai, Rinku & Ravallion, Martin & van de Walle, Dominique. (2012) found that according to the National Sample Survey data of 2009-10, there is more demand for work in the poorer states of India under MGNREGA. But the sad part is that much of this demand is unmet especially in the poorest ones where the need is most. The scheme is reaching the rural poor and the backward classes and women in particular, by attracting them to join the productive workforce.

Kulkarni, Ashwini, Pragati Abhiyan (2013) created a five-criterion composite performance index to evaluate MGNREGA. This included- 1. Coverage and distribution of job cards 2. Employment generated and demanded 3. Wage payment through post offices and banks 4. Utilization of funds 5. Accountability and transparency. They found that generally the demand given on the Management Information System (MIS) was not real. Period of completion depended on the type of work done and hence deciding whether a work is complete or

incomplete within a year is not a correct method of evaluation. It is necessary to ascertain the usefulness and relevance of works to villagers and evaluation of the works should be done accordingly.

Banerjee, Kaustav and Saha (2010) found that MGNREGA (the flagship programme of the Indian Government) encountered a lot of problems due to Maoist activities in the most backward regions of Jharkhand, Orissa and Chattisgarh. For development in these regions, it is necessary to first address these problems. The government needs to flush out the anti-developmentalists before any development programme can be successfully implemented. Anti-developmentalists include different groups engaged in anti-social activities which nullifies all the constructive efforts of the government. This programme has been successful in many areas and this might be one of the main reasons why it is lagging behind in these three states.

Adhikari, Anindita and Bhatia (2010) conducted a survey in one block each of Allahabad (UP) and Ranchi (Jharkhand). They found that a direct payment of wages in workers account can ensure that no embezzlement takes place and there is full accountability of the government funds. Earlier there were many cases reported on corrupt practices being carried out under MGNREGA. This was leading to lack of funds and the wages not reaching the poor rural workers. As an incentive to break this down, government has taken measures to create awareness about the banking system. The MGNREGA workers showed a very positive attitude towards banking systems and were very interested in learning more about the system.

Pankaj and Tankha (2010) examined the Impact of MGNREGA on rural women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. They found that women workers gained a lot through this scheme due to the income consumption effects, intra-household effects and enhancement of choice and capability. The income consumption effect gives a description of how an increased purchasing power will impact the consumption of rural poor. Intra-household determinants are calculated taking into mind many determinants such as expenditure on health, land ownership, education, occupation and nutrition. Despite the many hurdles faced, women workers benefitted from this scheme by their collective mobilisation.

Planning Commission (2010) conducted a survey which showed that number of beneficiaries moved from low earning levels to marginally higher incomes. Most of the beneficiaries were agricultural labourers and unskilled workers. There was a noticeable change in their expenditure patterns which moved from food to non-food items. Papola (2005) said that it was feasible to cover all rural households and offer work in all the districts at a lower cost than one that was projected in the beginning. This means that MGNREGA will be able to provide more employment opportunities with the same amount of funds allocated by the government. This will be a positive step towards securing and guaranteeing work for all.

Subhrata, Dutta (2009) conducted a study in West Bengal and found that some important challenges plague the MGNREGA scheme. There is much corruption, leakages of funds, frauds in muster rolls, embezzlement of government funds and major variations in wages. The Act specifies a minimum wage of Rs 73 but there are many interstate variations in the actual

wages being paid at the site. This lack of consistency has been a major cause of many setbacks which MGNREGA is facing currently. Addressing these issues would lead to a more positive impact on MGNREGA in rural areas.

Umay-Gailhad, Stefan Bojnec (2018) stressed that if green policies are adopted by the government they led to resource security, economic stability and green jobs. Resource security essentially deals with security against droughts, floods, energy disruptions and if not correctly assessed, may lead to many hazards like disease outbreak, mass migration, conflicts and also government instability. They studied the potential of creating green jobs in the agricultural sector and found that the green jobs increase total labour use and create more employment opportunities. It is important to ensure continuity of green jobs and enable rural youth to enter the agricultural sector with green skills.

OECD/Martinez-Fernandez, C, Hinojosa C, Miranda G (2010) said that after observing the impact of climate change, researchers working on alternative models of growth with their main interest in 'Green Growth Paradigm'. Green Growth Paradigm is the new revolutionary concept in development which talks about sustaining economic growth along with ensuring climatic and environmental sustainability. The paper argued that much benefit would come if focused efforts are there on green skill transformation and greener initiatives, especially in the rural areas.

The first comprehensive study on the green economy and its impact on work was done by Renner, M. Sweeney, S and Kubil, L (2008). The report found that there was a changing pattern of unemployment and many sectors (especially agriculture) was generating many green jobs to tackle climate change. Most of the assets being created in rural areas were consciously or unconsciously in tune with environmental sustainability. Though much work is needed in this area to generate a discernable impact, it is heartening to see a positive movement in this direction.

Atlama, Sevilay and Ceyda Ozsoy (2011) conducted a study on the possible effects of green economy on employment. According to them, green economy activities help in reducing environmental risks, minimize pollution and use greener technologies and products. Two distinct opinions are seen regarding effect of green jobs. According to the first opinion, through green jobs, millions of workers have become employed and also social problems like poverty and inequality have decreased. The second opinion is that green jobs increase marginal costs and will ultimately lead to increasing unemployment.

OECD(1999) said that there was a major difference between a brown economy and a green economy. In a brown economy, there was low energy efficiency, high usage of non-sustainable energy resources, high material usage and high degree of climate risk. A green economy consisted of productive assets which prevented, limited, minimised and corrected environmental damage to water, air and soil. They work on cleaner technologies, products and services.

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) along with International Labour

Organisation (ILO), International Trade Union Council, International Organisation of Employers and World Health Organisation in a 2008 report created a useful framework by which green jobs could be characterized. They defined green jobs as 'work in agriculture, manufacturing, research and development, administrative and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality. Specifically this includes jobs that help to protect eco-systems and bio-diversity, reduce energy, materials and water consumption through high efficiency strategies, decarbonize the economy and minimize or altogether avoid generation of all forms of waste and pollution.' It was further stressed that road ahead for green jobs will largely depend on decisions, practices and behavior of government, workers, consumers and private sector.

Scully-Russ, Ellen (2018) said that green jobs is an emerging area in its structure and nature and offers an opportunity to improve sustainability. She conducted a study to determine the effect on job creation and labour market functioning. The study found that green jobs help in improving the environment and closes the equity gap. The need is to make large scale efforts by understanding local conditions and relationships, industry and worker needs and coordinate market demand and supply.

Juliet, Adam and Zema, Tomasz (2018) proposed a reasonable definition of green jobs which took a balanced, durable and sustainable development as a base. Cecere, Grazia, Massimiliano Mazzanti (2017) observed that green jobs has societal efforts for long term endeavor to reconcile sustainability and development. They studied how micro and macro level factors influence green jobs.

Deschnes, Oliver (2015) expressed that green growth policies have gained prominence in the recent years worldwide. Many environmental challenges are associated with climatic changes and persistent environmental quality. Environmental challenges include soil degradation, deforestation, lack of drinking water, pollution of soil, water and air. All programmes dealing with green jobs should be evaluated under these criteria- A) Has it improved environmental quality? B) Has it created long-term employment and livelihood opportunities? C) Has it lead to a sustained competitive edge?

Bhaskar, Anjoy and Pankaj Yadav (2016) in their study found that more than one lakh wells were sanctioned for construction under MGNREGA in the past few years. They found that the majority of the works sanctioned had been completed during the assigned period. Most of the assets created are being used for irrigation leading to nearly three times the rise in agricultural income. In Jharkhand, the wells led to a six percent real rate of return.

Tiwari, Rakesh, H.I Somashekhar, VR Ramakrishna Parama, Indu K Murthi, MS Mohan Kumar, Harshad Parate, Murari Verma, Sumedha Malaviya, Ananya S Rao, Asmita Sengupta, Ruth Kattumuri, NH Ravindranath (2011) conducted a study in Chitradurga District, Karnataka and assessed the activities undertaken under MGNREGA and the potential to enhance and provide environmental services. Vulnerability indices were constructed to compare agricultural production in different areas. It was found that the activities undertaken by MGNREGA mainly focused on improving availability of resources and conserving them.

Most activities under MGNREGA are linked to water, soil and land. Environmental services include recharging groundwater, conserving water, reducing soil erosion, increasing soil fertility, carbon sequestration and enhancing supply of leaf manure. These activities are described as services provided by MGNREGA.

Fabio, Annamaria Di, Maureen E. Kenny (2019) conducted an extensive study for creating a reliable scale of measurement of decent jobs. They identified three important pillars of decent jobs, work as a means of survival and power, as a means for social connection and as a means for self-determination. If a work provides these, it will bring a feeling of work satisfaction and well-being to a worker.

Ruggeiro, Erica D, Joanna E. Cohen, Donald C Cole, Lisa Forman (2015) stressed on the fact that decent jobs is critical for the economic and social well-being of the workers. A decent job comprises of creating jobs, guarantees rights at work, extends social protection and promotes social dialogue. Their paper identified ten critical areas about decent jobs which shaped the work policies agenda of ILO, World Health Organisation and World Bank. These included social health and individual versus collective responsibility for decent jobs.

A.H.M Belayeth Hussain, Noraida Endut (2018) said that ILO had always stressed on certain minimum standards of decent work but that many nations all over the world are still lacking in this respect. They have failed to implement and enforce proper guidelines and policies for decent jobs which is based on a 15 item decent work scale. Social dialogue can influence decent work hours and fair treatment of workers at workplace. This can aid work-life balance among small ventures. Fabio, Annamaria Di and David L. Blustein (2016) linked the psychological features of decent work with fair dignified work which led to an overall improvement in livelihood standards.

ILO (2012) recognised the need to address diverse workplace as that of freedom, equity, security and human dignity at workplace for both men and women which can be productively worked out. All workers have an equal right to decent work, both formal and informal sectors, casual, self-employed and regular employees and predominantly women working in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude that though the concept of decent job and green job has received increased attention in the recent years, researchers have still not given much emphasis on studying the correlation or the impact of MGNREGA on green and decent jobs. Decent jobs and Green jobs have many aspects and if they are incorporated in MGNREGA while planning they can lead to the creation of lot of environment friendly community projects as well as lead to the physical and mental well-being of the workers.

REFERENCES

- Adhikari, Anindita and Kartika Bhatia (2010); "NREGA Wage Payments: Can We Bank on Banks?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 2, Vol. XLV No 1, p.p. 30-37.
- Annamaria Di Fabio and David L. Blustein (2016): "From Meaning of Working to Meaningful

- Lives: The Challenges of Expanding Decent Work": *Frontiers in Psychology*
- Annamaria Di Fabio, Maureen E. Kenny (2019): "Decent work in Italy: Context, conceptualization and assessment": *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 110 (2019) 131-143
- Ashwini Kulkarni, Pragati Abhiyan ; "MGNREGA: Alternative View": *Economic & Political Weekly EPW*; September 7, 2013 vol xlviii no 36, pp 4-5 Pragati Abhiyan (2013)
- Atlama, Sevilay and Ceyda ÖZSOY, (2011), "The Possible Effects of Green Economy on Employment", Paper presented at Econ Anadolu 2011: Anadolu International Conference in Economics II June 15-17, 2011, Eskişehir, Turkey
- Banerjee, Kaustav and Partha Saha (2010), "The NREGA, the Maoists, and the Development woes of the Indian State"; *Economic and Political Weekly E.P.W.*, July 10, Vol XLVN028, p.p 42-47
- Bhaskar , A.J Shah, A & Gupta, S, Ind. J. Labour Econ(2017), "7.5 Crore Green Jobs? Assessing the Greenness of MGNREGA.", Online ISSN 0019-5308 <http://doi.org/10.1007/S41027-017-0063-6>
- Cecere, Grazia, Massimiliano Mazzanti (2017): "Green jobs and eco-innovations in European SMEs", *Research and Energy Economics*, 49 (2017) 86-98
- Cecere, Grazia, Massimiliano Mazzanti (2017): "Green jobs and eco-innovations in European SMEs": *Research and Energy Economics* 49 (2017) 86-98
- Chhipa, Anil Kumar and Prof. J.S Panwar;" MGNREGA Programme and Rural Economy: Some Insights from Review of Literature"; *IRJMST Vol 6 Issue 11 [Year 2015] ISSN 2250 - 1959 (Online) 2348 - 9367 (Print)*
- Deschenes, Oliver (2015): "Green Jobs": *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2nd edition, Volume 10
- Dutta, Puja & Murgai, Rinku & Ravallion, Martin & van de Walle, Dominique. (2012); "Does India's Employment Guarantee Scheme Guarantee Employment?"; *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol 47, Issue No. 16, 21 Apr, 2012
- Erica Di Ruggiero, Joanna E. Cohen, Donald C. Cole. Lisa Forman (2015): "Competing conceptualization of decent work at the intersection of health, social and economic discourses": *Social Science and Medicine* 133(2015) 120-127
- Ilkay Umay-Gailhad, Stefan Bojnec (2018); "The impact of green economy measures on rural employment: Green jobs in farms"; *Journal of Cleaner Production* 208 (2019) 541-551
- International Labour Organisation (2012): *Gender equality and decent work: selected ILO conventions and recommendations that promote Gender Equality*, International Labour Standards Department, Geneva: ILO.
- Nagaraj, N & Srikantha Murthy, P.S. & Mysore, Chandrakanth & Bhattarai, Madhusudan & Singha Roy, Namrata. (2018). "Economic Impacts of MGNREGA in Dryland Region of

- India: A Meso and Micro Study in Selected States"; Employment Guarantee Programme and Dynamics of Rural Transformation in India, pp.265-287. 10.1007/978-981-10-6262-9_11.
- OECD/Martinez-Fernandez. C, Hinojosa C, Miranda G., "Green jobs and skills: the local labour market implications of addressing climate change", 8 February 2010, working document, CFE/LEED, OECD, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/43/44683169.pdf
- Pankaj, Ashok and Rukmini Tankha (2010); 'Empowerment Effects of the NREGAS on Women Workers: A study in Four States', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 24, Vol XLV No. 30, p.p. 45-55
- Planning Commission, "All India Report on Evaluation of NREGA: A survey of Twenty Districts"; Programme Evaluation Office Delhi: Institute of Applied Management Research and Planning Commission, Govt of India, 2010.
- Prakash Chandra Deogarhia; "MGNREGAS in Jharkhand"; *Journal of Regional Development and Planning*, Vol-3, No.1, 2014, pp77-86
- Scully-Russ, Ellen. (2018); "The Dual Promise of Green Jobs: Sustainability and Economic Equity"; 503-521. 10.1007/978-3-319-71389-2_27.
- Singh, A. (2014): "Assessing the Status and Environmental Implication of Works under MGNREGA in Uttarakhand": *Journal of Studies in Dynamics and Change (JSDC)*. 1(2), 113-124.
- Subhrata, Dutta (2009); "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) And Women Empowerment: A Study In East Medinipur District, West Bengal: Issues And Challenges": Vol.1.Issue.1.2014., www.ijless.kypublications.com
- Sweeney, S and Kubil, L (2008). Renner, M, Sweeney, S & Kubit, J 2008; "Green jobs: towards decent work in a sustainable, low-carbon world": Report for United Nations Environment Programme, ILO, Geneva, viewed 25 Dec 2019, <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_098503.pdf>.
- Tiwari, Rakesh, H.I Somashekhar, VR Ramakrishna Parama, Indu K Murthi, MS Mohan Kumar, Harshad Parate, Murari Verma, Sumedha Malaviya, Ananya S Rao, Asmita Sengupta, Ruth Kattumuri, NH Ravindranath ; "MGNREGA for Environmental Service Enhancement and Vulnerability Reduction: Rapid Appraisal in Chitradurga District, Karnataka": *Economic & Political Weekly* May 14, 2011 vol xlvi no 20, pp
- UNEP/ILO/IOE/ITUC, 2008; "Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable LowCarbon World"; http://www.unep.org/labour_environment/PDFs/Greenjobs/UNEP-GreenJobs-Report.pdf.