

**EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICALLY
CHALLENGED PERSONS UNDER MGNREGS: A Study Across
India**

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About 10 percent of the world's population (2.21 per cent of total Indian populations) suffers from some kind of disability and they are classified as Physically Challenged Persons (PCPs). PCPs are the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the society, are suffering from social stigma and isolation and discrimination in job market. However, MGNREGS has opened up new avenues of employment opportunities for PCPs. The paper insists of adequate measures for the inclusion of PCP in MGNREGS.

According to available estimates, approximately 10 percent of the world's population suffer from some kind of disability and are classified as Physically Challenged Persons (PCPs). PCP is now recognized as differently-abled persons and a sizeable proportion of this group may be involved in various social activities. However, Physically Challenged Persons (PCPs) are the most vulnerable and marginalized section of the society all over the world. They are suffering from social stigma and isolation. In general PCPs have been

facing several barriers that limit their participation in mainstream societal activities.

In India, PCPs have poor health outcomes, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. They also have experience of exclusion from everyday life activities. PCPs do not receive the disability-related services that they require.

In India, PCPs suffer from discrimination in job market despite some kind of reservation. According to 2011 census, about 2.21 per cent of total populations suffer from various types of disability in India. More than 75 percent PCPs lives in rural India. Available estimate suggests that the work participation rate among PCPs is 35 per cent. Experience suggests that employment problem of unskilled section of the PCPs is acute while the skilled and educated section are trying to cope with the adverse environment. They face a wide range of employment disadvantages, especially in rural areas. The major barrier to employment by PCPs continues to be attitudinal barriers. Explanations also lie with stereotypical thinking and the postulation that they are always incapable to do the work done by the normal people. However, situation has been changing slowly.

Government of India has different programmes to promote employment among PCPs. On 2 February 2006, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) came into force. The main objective of the act is to enhance 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. In this sense, it seems to be a boon for the disabled who have been hitherto excluded from different employment programme due to their differently abled nature coupled with the negative attitude prevailing in the society about their ability to undertake manual labour. Adequate measures are required for the inclusion of PCP in MGNREGS.

Objective, Methodology and Data Source

Marginalization of PCP is a social problem and consequences are various. Employment generation for this group requires both exclusive policy measure and efficiently utilizing the present environment. The paper addresses the problem of inclusion of PCPs in the wage employment programme of MGNREGS in India.

Societal negligence has been reflected in inadequacy of reliable information. In what follows some qualitative and quantitative information is available with population census and NSSO in India.

Government publication and private research are also utilized as supplementary sources. Publications and reports of international bodies - UNO, WHO- have also been utilized. For employment we have extensively utilized the data of Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. However, it is difficult to ignore the compatibility of different sources due to variation of coverage and disability characterization.

Disability - Understanding the Concept

Disability is related with human condition. Disabled people exist in every community of the world. Disability is a dynamic phenomenon-modified by changes in environment (Jahiel, 2007) and academic understanding. Concepts and understanding of human disability are observed to be undergoing continuous modification and consequently administrative attention across the world. The central concern in modern debates appears to be 'how one should view the presence of a disability' (Barnes, 2009).

Though convergence in conceptualization is desirable, universally accepted definition of disability is yet to emerge and according to some researchers probably impossible to achieve. Different international organizations discussed the concept of disability in diverse ways.

World Health Organization has addressed the disability issue and provides a conceptual framework for disability with three significant aspects or issues; they are interrelated and overlapping in some sense: Impairment; Disability and Handicap.

One may observe some hierarchical order in conceptualization. Impairment is "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function".

Disability is a "restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being". And handicap is a "disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual".

In 2001, the "International Classification of Functioning and Disability" (ICF) explains the concept of "disability," or "functional" abilities or inabilities as an umbrella concept applicable both for the body perspective, and to the individual and society perspective.

In India, disability condition has been introduced essentially following the medical model and, as such, they have been based on various criteria of ascertaining abnormality or pathologic conditions of persons. In 1995, The Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD-Equal opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) has defined disability as a person suffering from not less than forty per cent of any disability as certified by a medical authority. The disabilities identified are; blindness, low vision, cerebral palsy, leprosy, leprosy cured, hearing impairment, locomotors disability, mental illness and mental retardation.

Census and NSSO are two important sources for quantitative information on disability. NSSO considered disability as “Any restriction or lack of abilities to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for human being”. However, in India, disability issue is moving from medical to human rights issue. But, the society has created doubt about their rights.

Employment Status of PCP in MGNREGS - Interstate Variations

Globally, PCPs face a wide range of complexity in employment opportunity. It is found that in high income countries, PCPs are more likely to have access to the services to decent employment. But in some developing countries, the available data indicate that the

unemployment rate is estimated to be 80 per cent and above. However, the majority of studies find that persons with disability have lower employment rates than persons without disability irrespective of countries (Table-1).

Table - 1
Employment Rate of Disabled People Across Countries

<i>Employment Range (percentage)</i>	<i>Countries</i>
10 - 20	Serbia, South Africa
20 - 30	Mexico, Japan
30 - 40	UK, India, Netherland
40 - 50	Australia, USA, Germany
50 - 60	Sweden
60 - 70	Norway

Data relates to 2000; Source: OECD (2003)

It can be seen that maximum countries fall within the groups 30 to 50 percentage. Thus it can be predicted that global average of employability of PWDs stands roughly in the group 30 to 50 percentages.

The employment of PCPs is cause for serious concern. However, in India, the employment opportunity for PCPs is insignificant. In a rural Indian agrarian context, rather than disability per se, the ability of a person to be engaged in gainful employment determines whether an individual is considered to be disabled (Erb and Harris-White, 2001); among persons with disabilities (PWDs), acceptance within their local communities was contingent upon whether they were employed

through waged labour or domestic work. India, unlike most developing countries, has a disability policy and a variety of programs to promote employment among PCPs. There are various laws and programs that are designed, at least in part, to promote the employment of PCPs.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a flagship programme of wage employment programme in rural India. The main distinguishing feature of this scheme is that it is demand based, rights based and inclusive in nature. It is a unique poverty alleviation programme implemented in the country. The Act came into force on February 2, 2006 and was implemented in a phased manner.

MGNREGA is the first ever law that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale. The primary objective of the Act is augmenting wage employment. Its auxiliary objective is strengthening natural resource management through works that address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation and soil erosion and so encourage sustainable development. The process outcomes include strengthening grass root processes of democracy and infusing transparency and accountability in governance.

In India, PCPs have been excluded from unskilled wage employment programme due to their handicap or differently abled nature coupled with the negative attitude prevailing in the society about their ability to undertake unskilled manual labour. However, the introduction of NREGS heralds a new chapter in the history of wage employment for the PCPs.

Though no special provision has been made to the disabled in respect of allotment of works, the Act clearly states that the disabled should be given suitable work that suits to his/her ability and qualifications. Similarly, the provision of 3 per cent reservation in MGNREGS as specified in the Disability Act (1995) mainly depends on the implementing agency. Due to insensitivity to the problems of the disabled and negative attitude of the implementation officials, the disabled person may not get any preference while allotting the work.

Though PCPs have not received any special attention in MGNREGS, the measure is helpful; many PCPs have been benefited from MGNREGS in India. But, considering the total population of disabled in the country their coverage under the scheme is very poor. The number of disabled beneficiaries covered under this scheme during the years of 2009-10 and 2010-11 in different states in India can be seen from Table-2.

Table - 2
Disabled MGNREGS Beneficiary: Interstate Variations

States/Union territories	Disabled Persons (0.00)	Disabled Beneficiaries			
		(2009-2010)		(2010-2011)	
		Total (0.00)	Percent of state total	Total(0.00)	Percent of state total
Andaman & Nicobar	7057	85	1	1	0
Andhra Pradesh	1364981	68256	5	61978	4
Arunachal Pradesh	33315	18	0	1	0
Assam	530300	1989	0	1792	0
Bihar	1887611	34161	2	3533	0
Chandigarh	15538	0	0	-	-
Chhattisgarh	419887	11221	3	22906	6
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	4048	0	0	0	0
Daman and Diu	3171	0	0	25	1
Goa	15749	3	0	-	-
Gujarat	1045465	10926	1	28059	3
Himachal Pradesh	155950	1791	1	2112	1
Haryana	455040	74	0	234	0
Jammu and Kashmir	302670	1037	0	332	0
Jharkhand	448377	5515	1	8682	2
Karnataka	940643	8522	1	5977	1
Kerala	860794	2661	0	2583	0
Lakshadweep	1678	0	0	0	0
Madhya Pradesh	1408528	8665	1	22232	2
Maharashtra	1569582	2186	0	10994	1
Manipur	28376	513	2	133	1
Meghalaya	28803	518	2	93	0
Mizoram	16011	236	2	57	0
Nagaland	26499	271	1	41	0
Orissa	1021335	4017	0	4639	0
Pondicherry	25857	8	0	4	0
Punjab	424523	114	0	183	0
Rajasthan	1411979	11586	1	3110	0
Sikkim	20367	164	1	53	0
Tamil Nadu	1642497	9381	1	37862	2
Tripura	58940	13678	23	10018	17

Uttar Pradesh	3453369	47523	1	13279	0
Uttarakhand	194769	505	0	280	0
West Bengal	1847174	51591	3	72535	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>21637969</i>	<i>297215</i>	<i>1.37</i>	<i>313728</i>	<i>1.5</i>

Sources: 1) NREGA, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development;
2) Census of India, 2001, GOI

As per the 2001 census, the proportion of disabled in the selected States is given in the Table-2, which accounts for 2.16 crores. From the Table it may be seen that the maximum number of disabled (23 per cent) benefited from MGNREGA in the year 2009-10 was reported in the State of Tripura followed by Andhra Pradesh which stood at 5 per cent. In the States of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, 3 per cent each of the disabled benefited from the scheme in the year 2009-10. In Bihar the benefited disabled accounted for 2 per cent of the disabled. North-eastern states like Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram engaged 2 per cent of the disabled in MGNREGA work, while Sikkim provided employment to 1 per cent of the disabled. The number of disabled engaged in NREGA in the rest of the states and union territories was very marginal.

From the Table-2, it may further be noted that in terms of number of disabled engaged in employment for the year 2010- 11, Tripura topped the list with 17 per cent and Chhattisgarh stood second with 7 per cent. West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh had the same distribution of 4 per cent each. The next highest was reported in Gujarat (3 per cent)

followed by Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand accounting for 2 per cent each of the disabled. Distribution in the order of 1 per cent was reported in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and union territory of Daman and Diu. The distribution in the rest of the states and union territories was very marginal.

We have seen that the total population of disabled in the selected states stood at 2.16 crores. In the year 2009-10 the total number of disabled individual beneficiaries benefited in MGNREGS was 297215 indicating that number of disabled benefited from employment was only 1.37 per cent. While in the following year of 2010-11, the number of disabled engaged in employment was 1.5 per cent indicating marginal increase. The macro level national level data showed that even after implementation of MGNREGA work nearly for the last 5 years only 1.5 per cent of disabled could benefit from the scheme. This figure is only half of the figure of the mandated 3 per cent reservation made available to them. The reasons for this low level of participation may be due to lack of awareness about the scheme, discrimination in the community and work place, environmental barriers among other factors associated with disability.

Conclusion

Implementation of MGNREGS has proved to be rewarding to the PWD as they enjoy the right to work for 100 days provided they are willing to take up unskilled wage labour. Many PWDs have been denied or kept away from wage labour due to the wrong notion that disabled could not work and even if they work, output would not be worth to the payment made. As a result of this, they were kept away from wage labour in the agriculture and construction sectors. Implementation of MGNREGS has provided opportunities for those disabled to work and earn decent income to support the family.

Like others, the PCPs were also keen and interested in undertaking employment suited to their physical and mental conditions. The current level of work participation of disabled population either in skilled or unskilled employment sector is very low despite the protective measure extended through the Disability Act (1995). One of the reasons for low participation is due to the social and environmental barrier erected around them. The study reveals that many of those disabled who were hitherto denied or deprived of employment in the unskilled sector got an opportunity to take up wage employment for the first time in their life and earn a modest income. However, the national level data, considering the total population of the disabled, showed that the number of them engaged in MGNREGS is too small.

Some of the UTs and north-eastern States are yet to involve disabled in NREGS work. Considering their vulnerability, physical and mental condition, there is a need to provide conducive working environment by discounting of work norms to attract them into NREGS work. Such an action will help the disabled to realize their potential and contribute to the nation building.

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