

## PERFORMANCE OF MGNREGA IN DARJEELING GORKHA HILL COUNCIL DISTRICT

**Pauline Ahoy**

*Covering three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) this paper scan the performance of MGNREGA, reflects on how far the programme has achieved the crucial objectives and offers few suggestions for improving the outcome*

1990s was termed as a period of 'job-less growth' as high GDP growth rates failed to generate adequate employment opportunities. In fact, during 1993-94 - 1999-2000 annual GDP growth rates increased and stood at over 7 per cent per annum but employment growth rate declined and it was only a little over 1 per cent per annum. While the share of the agricultural sector in total employment is persistently plummeting, over half of the entire labor force remains engaged in agriculture. But agriculture contributes to less than a quarter of GDP and is characterized by low productivity and low earnings leading to significant poverty in rural areas. In 2004-05, the numbers of workers in rural India was estimated to be over 74 million. The failure to create growth and enhance productivity in all sectors is widening disparities between the urban and rural areas including distress migration. The continuing challenge of poverty and inequality in India is linked to the segmented nature of the labour market, gender disparities in wages and participation. It was in this overall crisis of employment and livelihoods,

especially in rural areas, that the NREGA was conceived, and enacted by the central government. Prior to NREGA, there was intense debate and discussion about the benefits and problems of erstwhile employment generation programmes. Consequently the NREGA has been designed to minimize the well known problems of leakages and corruption in past programmes, including an incentive structure for performance and disincentive for non performance and accountability through periodic social audits for evaluation and improvement. The NREGA is an attempt at providing universal coverage towards a basic social floor. It is different from previous employment programmes to the extent that it is rights-based and demand-driven, and envisages local governments and community participation in its implementation.

### **Basic Promise**

Public employment programmes based on labour intensive technologies have been used in developed and developing countries, often as a response to crisis - during depression, post war reconstruction, economic crisis, recession as well as during floods, earthquakes, etc. Since the early 1970s, quite a few developing countries have experimented with such programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America. These include Indonesia's Padat Karya, which was relaunched in 1998 after the economic crisis, Argentina's Jefes De Hogar in 2002, Botswana's labour based relief programmes, South Africa's expanded public works programme from 2004, Bangladesh's Food for Work programme etc. The primary objective of these public employment programmes is to provide a form of social security by providing a basic income through labour intensive employment that will at the same time contribute to creating public assets. Such programmes typically provide a 'last resort wage employment' opportunity for vulnerable groups who are

unemployed and / or underemployed. If properly planned, labour intensive public works programmes can not only alleviate poverty, but can also enhance the economic growth and social equity. These are usually targeted jobs programme, paying minimum wages, with an aim to create a social floor and have the potential to reduce poverty. 'Employment of last Resort' programmes based on government expenditure would be good for the economy too. In most developing countries, with large informal economies, private sector is insufficient to provide full productive employment. The rationale for these programmes are based on the premise that the government has an active role to play in promoting full employment in developing economies by assuming the role of the market maker for labour. The main criticism against these programmes have been that they are ridden with corruption and therefore benefits often do not reach the beneficiaries but are siphoned off by others.

NREGA has been implemented in three phases---1<sup>st</sup> phase where 200 backward districts were notified with effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2006. 2<sup>nd</sup> phase where NREGA was extended to 130 districts in the financial year 2007-08 (113 districts from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007 & 17 districts of UP were notified with effect from May 15<sup>th</sup> 2007) and 3<sup>rd</sup> phase where all the remaining districts in all the states and Union Territories were notified from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Its objective is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment at prevailing minimum wages for rural unskilled labour in a financial year to a household, while generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural to urban distress migration and promoting social equity.

In fact, NREGA has 3 distinct goals: i) Protective: It protects the rural poor from vulnerabilities by providing them demand based employment. ii) Preventive: It prevents risk associated with agricultural investment and forced migration of rural poor. iii) and Prosperity: It brings prosperity in rural economy via increased consumption demand. Thus, MGNREGA can be considered as a growth engine for the economic growth and prosperity of our country.

### **Methodology**

The data for the analysis have been collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, periodicals, reports published by Ministry of Rural Development Department (West Bengal Government) and NREGA website. Focusing on the eight blocks of DGHC district---Kalimpong-I, Kalimpong-II, Garubathan, Kurseong, Mirick, Darjeeling Pulbazar, Rongli Rongliot, Jorebunglow Sukhia Pokhari the analysis and interpretation has been done

West Bengal is a state in eastern India and is the nation's fourth most populous state, with over 91 million inhabitants (91,347,736) i.e. 7.55% of India's population. DGHC district being one of the tiniest districts of West Bengal comprises of majority Nepali community and have a population of 1.8 million (1842034) out of which 50.75% are male and 49.25% are female. Having a growth rate of 14.47%, sex ratio of 971, literacy rate of 79.92% people miserably suffer from the bugbear of unemployment and poverty. From 1856 onwards with the advent of British planters in Darjeeling tea business was commercialized which was the reason behind huge inflow of Nepali migrants, majority of whom worked as tea garden workers and agricultural labourers. The commercial activities of the area also attracted a

large number of people from the plains. Tea and tourism are the two significant economic activities in this region, generating most of the employment and revenue in the area. Tourism is basically a seasonal activity and the economic benefits of tourism reach to only a few portion of urban and semi-urban population. Paucity of industries, factories, modern institutions and higher academic institutions deprive this region from the mainstream development process. Moreover small and cottage industries that have huge potentialities in the region area are also lacking improvement. Subsistence agriculture, livestock, forestry, plantations and allied activities form the sizeable portion of economic activities in the rural areas of the district. Agriculture is seasonal and is not a reliable source of livelihood due to predominance of small and marginal landholdings. As a result there has been a constant decline in the share of agricultural employment over time. There is very few employment choices left with the people and those who are unable to find regular jobs either have to seek place in tourism sector or engage themselves as casual workers in different capacities. The mountainous areas of the district, small and marginal land holdings, landslides, political instability, dearth of infrastructural facilities and closure of many tea gardens have aggravated the problem of unemployment and poverty in DGHC district. Under such a situation people tend to see MGNREGA as a messiah.

### **Performance of NREGA: Analysis of Trends**

During 2010-11 financial year the fund utilization against availability of fund was 69.25% in DGHC district. Then the figure increased to 81.94% in 2011-12 and further augmented to 90.83% in 2012-13. But utilization of fund decreased to 88.54% in 2013-14. Somewhat encouraging phase came in 2014-

15 which saw an increase by 92.26%. Thus, one can apprehend that DGHC district is utilizing the funds a bit prudently.

In DGHC district person-days generation in 2010-2011 was 2462923. In 2014-15 person-days generation was 5560537, an improvement by 125.78% as compared to 2010-2011. In between there has been fluctuation where the highest person-days generated (7806786) was in 2012-2013.

More and more people in DGHC district are getting attracted towards this programme. Job cards issued in 2010-11 was 1, 25,232. The issue of job cards has been on the increase in every financial year. In 2014-15 the total number of job cards issued was 1, 47,261 i.e. an increment by 17.59% compared to 2010-11.

DGHC district provided employment to 1, 25,232 households in 2010-11. It enhanced manifolds in the following years and in 2014-15, the district provided employment to 1,49,358 households indicating an increase by 19.27% compared to 2010-2011.

Positive scenario manifests as far as the issue of job cards to the marginalized sections of the society (SC, ST and BPL) is concerned. In 2010-2011, 8,716 job cards were issued to SC households. By 2014-2015 it increased by 14.93%. In case of ST category there has been an increase in the issue of job cards from 39,243 in 2010-2011 to 44,790 in 2014-2015 indicating an increase of 14.14%. So far as BPL category is concerned similar improvement is perceptible.

In SC category 4765 households were provided employment in the financial year 2010-2011 which further increased to 6035, meaning an increase of 26.65%. Similar is the trend for ST category. We see an increase of 35.28% as 20426 ST households were provided employment in the year 2010-2011 which further amplified to 27632. But the reverse is true for the BPL category. In the BPL category we see that 16,058 households were provided employment in the year 2012-2013 which further decreased to 13,269 in 2014-2015 meaning a decline by 17.34%.

In the financial year 2010-2011, person-days generation among SC, ST & BPL were 1,58,937, 7,85,062 and 0 respectively. But in the financial year 2014-2015 the figures raised to 3,16,029, 1482367 and 803220 respectively. The increase of percentage for SC & ST is 98.84% & 88.82% respectively. In case of BPL category, we see that in the financial year 2012-2013 person-days generation was 1042743 which dropped down to 803220 meaning a decline by 22.97%.

**Table 1**  
**Person-days Generated to SC, ST & Women During 2014-2015**

<i>Blocks</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>Women</i>
Darjeeling Pulbazar	26524	06226	284904
Garubathan	36449	138258	266686
Jorebunglow Sukhia Pokhari	17895	96647	170837
Kalimpong-i	48925	182944	268215
Kalimpong-ii	33274	282370	397385
Kurseong	90481	275309	501900
Mirick	34726	132737	214231
Rangli Rongliot	27755	167876	267975
Total	316029	1482367	2372133

Source: nrega.nic.in

Table 1 demonstrates that person days generated in financial year 2014-2015 among SC, ST and women were 316029, 1482367 and 2372133 respectively. Women person-days generation is the highest in comparison to SC & ST

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indicating that women are welcoming this Act open heartedly as it is making them financially independent.

**Table 2**  
**Household Completed 100 Days in 2014-2015**

<i>Blocks</i>	<i>SC</i>	<i>ST</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>Total</i>
Darjeeling Pulbazar	14	202	340	556
Garubathan	36	199	532	767
Jorebunglow Sukhia Pokhari	3	37	101	141
Kalimpong-i	146	469	684	1299
Kalimpong-ii	123	1170	1841	3134
Kurseong	143	425	991	1559
Mirick	24	59	126	209
Rangli Rongliot	6	53	82	141
Total	495	2614	4697	7806

Source: nrega.nic.in

As in evident from Table 2 very few households have been able to complete 100 days of employment in the financial year 2014-2015. Hence, efforts should be made to provide 100 days of employment to many households as possible in future.

**Table 3**  
**Labour Material Ratio (2014-2015)**

<i>Blocks</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Total</i>
Darjeeling Pulbazar	1079.97(57.22%)	807.46(42.78%)	1887.43
Garubathan	403.7(45.29%)	487.57(54.71%)	891.27
Jorebunglow Sukhia Pokhari	406.82(57.21%)	304.23(42.79%)	711.05
Kalimpong-i	707.52(50.96%)	680.73(49.04%)	1388.25
Kalimpong-ii	583.32(46.19%)	679.57(53.81%)	1262.89
Kurseong	994.89(51.34%)	942.93(48.66%)	1937.82
Mirick	724.03(65.39%)	383.16(34.16%)	1107.19
Rangli Rongliot	898.06(55.92%)	707.91(44.08%)	1605.97
Total	5798.31(53.73%)	4993.56(46.27%)	10791.87

Source : nrega.nic.in

As per the provision of the NREG Act 60:40 ratio has to be maintained between wage and material. From Table 3 it can be seen that the wage



material ratio has not been maintained: it was 53.73:46.27 in 2014-15. Such deviations have to be taken care of in future.

**Table 4**  
**Nature of Asset Created During 2014-2015 (in No.)**

Asset Type)	I*	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Flood control	112	0	0	24	30	1	43	0
Rural connectivity	406	0	0	89	27	8	316	1
Water harvesting	10	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
Rotation water bodies	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Drought proofing	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	0
Irrigation canals	3	0	0	4	0	0	6	0
Land development	25	0	0	6	3	3	122	13
Rural drinking water	1	0	0	1	5	0	2	0
Fisheries	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Rural sanitation	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

\*I=Darjeeling Pulbazar, II=Garubathan, III=Jorebunglow, IV=Kalimpong I, V=Kalimpong II, VI= Kurseong, VII=Mirick, VIII= Rangli Rongliot : Source://http:nrega.nic.in

As Table 4 reflects, maximum works have been done in the sphere of rural connectivity as compared to other works. Emphasis needs to be given to other schemes as well. Through these initiatives rural people's life will improve and the economy of the district will advance.

### Way Forward

NREGA has the unequivocal promise of at least 100 days of employment to every willing household in a year. Ironically, it has so far failed to keep the promise. Actual employment generation in maximum cases has been less than 100 days. So efforts should be made to generate more and more employment opportunities. At least 100 days of employment as promised are not at all adequate for the rural poor for sustaining or maintaining the living. Therefore, the number of days of employment should be enhanced to help the poor. In drought prone areas the number of days of employment

has already been increased to 150 days. Such an augmentation in the number of days of employment would be beneficial for the people of DGHC district of West Bengal.

More opportunity of works should be created so that those who require and demand work could be provided employment thereby making them less vulnerable to shocks and other agony.

Priority should be given to agriculture related works as agriculture is purely seasonal. The workers of closed tea gardens of DGHC district where people are suffering miserably from starvation and malnutrition need special attention and intervention.

There is a massive scale of corruption in the NREGA in the DGHC district. The job card and muster roll details on MGNREGA website shows names of people who have government jobs and people who never do manual labour, but have been shown as workers. Detailed investigation and audit is necessary to keep a check over corruption and leakages.

More people have received job cards than the number of people who usually work in NREGA projects. Thus, more funds than actually required are claimed and consequently embezzled by local officials. Bribes of RS 50 are reportedly to be paid for receiving the job card. A strict vigil is to be kept by the government to stop this type of malpractices and corruption.

To encourage and serve womenfolk, women friendly environment should be introduced and maintained in the worksites such as crèches, milk facilities and a female caretaker. There are many factors that encourage the women

workers to participate in this scheme that include nature of work, which do not need skilled worker, the limited hours of work, availability of work locally, substantial jump in the wage rate, decent working conditions etc .NREGA brings together many similarly situated women in the work sites and provides an opportunity for women's voice. MGNREGA is an important work opportunity for women who would otherwise have remained unemployed or underemployed resulting in the economic hardship for women. To increase women participation in the scheme job cards should be provided to single, widowed, deserted and destitute women as well.

In case employment is not provided within 15 days from the date of demand for work unemployment allowance should be provided and the allowance should be paid as calculated by the computer system or the management information system and as provided under the Act. Moreover, in many cases there has been a delay in wage payment. Under such circumstances compensation should be provided to the workers.

MIS (management information system) staff is very important for proper implementation of this scheme hence adequate number of MIS staff should be deployed at the earliest. Fair remuneration should be given to the workers taking into account the wage rates in the local market.

Capacity Building and Training of officials at the district block and Gram Panchayat levels for their proper understanding of the various provisions of the Act and for the proper implementation of the Act.

Drama at village level in the local language, leaflets, handbills, wall writing should be conducted to create awareness among rural people about this

scheme. Thus campaigning about the scheme is crucial for generating awareness.

No doubt, there are certain loopholes and ambiguities which need to be identified and rectified at the earliest for the improved performance of NREGA. However, the performance of DGHC district is not absolutely discouraging. The overall impact of NREGA works has been reflected in the better rural communication; decline in rural unemployment; decline in thefts in rural areas; increase in agricultural production; increase in financial activity of rural household; increase in financial activity of women; increase in vegetation covered areas and decline in flood affected areas.

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Pauline Ahoy, Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Parimal Mitra Smriti Mahavidyalaya, Malbazar, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, E-mail: pauline\_ahoy@yahoo.co.in