

## Rural Development Process through MGNREGA in Nachou Gram Panchayat, Manipur: Grass Root Level Perspectives

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**Abstract:** Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 is the Government of India's most important rural poverty alleviation programme with the primary objective of enhancing the livelihood security of rural people by providing wage employment to unskilled labour. It is also expected to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of rural poor so that the employment generation is on sustainable basis. The Act further acts as a powerful instrument for inclusive growth. At this juncture, it is felt essential to examine the socio-economic condition of the beneficiary households and the impact of MGNREGA on socio-economic upliftment of the rural people. To contextualize the impact of MGNREGA in the condition of Manipur, an attempt has thus been made in this study to observe the beneficiaries' perception towards its contribution to the socio-economic upliftment of rural people in Nachou Gram Panchayat of Bishnupur District, Manipur.

**Key words:** MGNREGA, Socio-economic, Nachou, Manipur.

### INTRODUCTION:

Poverty is seen to be endemic in rural areas of the country where rural population constitutes 73.22% of the persons below poverty line accounting to 2209.24 million poor out of the total 3017.2 million poor in 2004-05 (GOI, Indian Planning Commission, 2014). As India's population lives in rural areas and 56% of it draws its sustenance from agriculture and allied activities there is a pressing need to increase productivity in the sectors that sustain the rural economy (Asian Development Bank, 2011). Clearly, this calls for an effective wage employment programme in rural areas thereby the Government of India (GOI) enacted the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005 which provides wage employment and promotes agricultural productivity through creation of rural assets and infrastructure.

The Act has the mandate to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. Thus, primary objective of the Act is to enhance the livelihood security of the rural poor by providing wage employment to unskilled labour through works that address the causes of chronic poverty like drought proofing, deforestation, soil erosion, etc. It further aims to create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor so that the process of employment generation is on sustainable basis. MGNREGA is also a powerful instrument for inclusive growth in rural India through its impact on social protection, livelihood security and democratic empowerment. (MGNREGA Operational Guideline, 2013).

### MGNREGA in Manipur:

It is a fact that Manipur lives in rural areas. As per 2011 census, 70.79% of the total State population is found in rural areas while only 29.21% is settled in the urban areas. As reported by the Tendulkar Expert Group, 38% of the State's population lives below the poverty line as against the all India average of 37%. Thus, Manipur is amongst the poorest states in the country. Against the backdrop of this poor economic condition of the State, MGNREGA was first implemented in Tamenglong District, the most economically backward district of the State in Phase I with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2006. It was extended in two districts viz, Churachandpur and Chandel in phase II during 2007-08. It was further extended in the remaining six districts viz, Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal, Bishnupur, Senapati and Ukhrul in phase III with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Now the total number of workers under the scheme has been recorded as 10.41 lakhs which account for 71% of the total rural population in the State. Average days of employment provided per household have been decreasing significantly from 62 days in 2012-13, through 24 days in 2013-14, to only 15 days in 2014-15. This shows that the scheme has not been implemented in its true spirit, wherein every household does not get minimum number of 100 days of

employment since its inception. The major objective of providing livelihood security of the scheme still remains as a dream.

Such a disappointed situation of the scheme demands a careful assessment of the programme and its impact on the livelihood of the developpees at the grass root level so that we can gain a grounded perspective on the achievements of the objectives of the scheme. Against this backdrop, an attempt has thus been made to bring to light the role of MGNREGA in rural poverty reduction of Manipur in the context of three villages, namely, Nachou, Potsangbam and Upokpi that come under the jurisdiction of Nachou Gram Panchayat (GP) of Bishnupur District, Manipur. The average number of working days per household in this GP remains low with 24 days in 2008-09, 4 days in 2009-10, 66 days in 2010-11, 44 days in 2011-12, 43 days in 2012-13, 9 days in 2013-14 and 27 days in 2014-15. The prescribed 100 days of employment in a financial year has never been provided in the GP since programme inception. Also, the prescribed 14 days of continuous work have been provided only once in 2009. After this, 1 to 5 continuous days of work has become the characteristic of the scheme in the GP. Moreover, the study is also devoted to throw light on the developers' perceptions towards the contribution of the scheme in improving their socio-economic condition.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD:

The study is an empirical study based on household survey method. Data were collected both from primary and secondary sources employing such standard techniques of anthropological research as schedule, semi structured interviews from a sample of 200 beneficiary households randomly selected. The schedule is prepared on the basis of MGNREGA operational guidelines adopting the impact assessment methodology proposed by various Professional Institutional Network (PIN) of MGNREGA. Field work for the study was conducted in the selected GP from January 2014 to December 2015 intermittently. Secondary data were collected from reference sources mainly through published as well as unpublished works in the form of government official reports, project reports by various Professional Institutional Network (PIN) of MGNREGA, articles, dissertation, web enabled application (known as MGNREGA soft) which is hosted at the portal accessible as <http://nrega.nic.in> and other internet sources. Quantitative data were classified, tabulated and presented in simple percentage for interpretation. Primarily, the method of case study i.e. case and situation analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs) and work site visits were adopted to analyse the qualitative data generated.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

#### Socio-Economic Profile of the Sample Respondents:

Socio-economic indicators such as gender, age, marital status, educational level of the respondents, family type, land use pattern, family income and main source of the family income are considered to present the socioeconomic profile of the sample beneficiaries.

**Table 1: General Profile of the Respondents**

	Gender of the respondent		Total	Age Group Classification					
	Male	Female		Male+Female	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
<b>Marital Status</b>									
Unmarried	4	5	9(4.5)	8	1	0	0	0	0
Married	87	74	161(80.5)	21	48	50	24	16	2
Widow/widower	6	21	27(13.5)	1	3	5	11	5	2
Divorce	0	3	3(1.5)	0	1	1	1	0	0
Total	97(48.5)	103(51.5)	200(100.0)	30(15.0)	53(26.5)	56(28.0)	36(18.0)	21(10.5)	4(2.0)
<b>Whether Physically Disabled</b>			Total						
No	96	101	197(98.5)	30	52	55	35	21	4
Yes	1	2	3(1.5)	0	1	1	1	0	0
<b>Educational Level</b>			Total						
Non literate	37	46	83(41.5)	0	10	24	27	18	4

Literate but no formal schooling	4	1	5(2.5)	0	2	1	1	1	0
Primary	12	10	22(11.0)	2	7	8	4	1	0
Middle	15	19	34(17.0)	11	9	13	1	0	0
Secondary	9	14	23(11.5)	8	10	3	1	1	0
Higher secondary	13	11	24(12.0)	6	11	5	2	0	0
Graduate or higher	7	2	9(4.5)	3	4	2	0	0	0

Source: Field Survey Note: Figures in the Parentheses Indicate Percentage

The data in Table 1 show that from a total of 200 respondents, 48.5% are males compared to 51.5% females. So, both male and female are being engaged almost equally in the works under MGNREGA. This remarkable percentage of female representation in the gender wise distribution of the sample respondents reveals that the participation of the women has been encouraging in accordance with the MGNREGA guideline that clearly states that priority shall be given to women while providing employment in such a way that at least one-third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have been registered and requested for work under the scheme.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) have also revealed that the high proportion of female workers is because of the villagers' outlook that work under MGNREGA is suitable for women as it does not demand much physical labour. Before MGNREGA came into force most of the women, who were primarily engaged in the household chores, remained economically unproductive for most part of the year when they were not engaged in agricultural work.

Regarding age of the workers, MGNREGA aims at giving employment opportunities to adult members (18 years and above) of every rural household whereas there is no upper age limit to work under this scheme. The Act considers the senior citizens (above 65 years) a special category and it further states that special works which require lesser physical effort should be identified and allotted to the group.

It is observed from the data as well as worksite visit during field work that majority of the workers are in the middle age group (31-50 years). To put it differently, they belong to the physically most productive age group. The proportion of beneficiaries in the older age group of 61+ years is 12.5%. One of the respondents, Irom Tombi, aged 80 years bearing job card number MN06-003-010-002/209 stated that *"I was told just to make myself present at the worksite. Sometimes, I looked after the children of other younger co-workers at the worksite. The coming of the scheme makes me happier as I earn money from the scheme and get more respect from my family members than earlier"*

Around 1.5% of the sample respondents, as evident from the data, are disabled. They are also provided with the same number of employment days as other workers since their registration is in conformity with the MGNREGA operational guideline. Interaction with these people reveals that they are engaged in works that require lesser physical activity.

Data on the education level show that 41.5% of the total respondents are non literate. The data further reveal that about 72% of the respondents are either non literate or has very low level of education (up to middle level). It can be concluded that majority of the respondents are not well educated. Though the work under MGNREGA is generally meant for unskilled and semi-skilled persons, 28% of the respondents have educational level ranging from secondary level, through higher secondary level, to graduate level and above. This signifies the precarious livelihood condition of the educated unemployed youths and gives a strong message for the urgent need of the livelihood-related-skill-development programme for the educated rural poor in the study area.

Table on marital status shows that the majority (80.5%) of the sample workers are married and only 4.5% are unmarried. It further reveals that 13.5% are widows/widowers and 1.5% are divorcees. The grounded data from the field site clearly show that composition of workers is in tune with MGNREGA Operational Guidelines where widowed women, deserted women and destitute women are treated as highly vulnerable group who require special attention. As reported by some widowed workers, they were identified and approached by their respective ward members for registration under the scheme.

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Sample Households**

Type Of Family	Classification of Monthly Family Income							
	less than 5000	5000 to 10000	10001 to 15000	15001 to 20000	20001 to 25000	25001 to 30000	Above 30000	Total
Nuclear	12	57	44	17	10	13	7	160(80.0)
Joint/Extended	0	17	9	3	2	7	2	40(20.0)
Total	12(6.0)	75(37.5)	53(26.5)	20(10)	12(6)	20(10)	8(4.0)	200(100)
Classification of Cultivators								
Marginal (upto 2.5 acre)	5	39	25	9	3	11	4	96(34.5)
Small (2.5 acre to 5 acre)	1	7	6	3	6	12	2	27(9.8)
Landless	6	26	21	7	2	6	1	69(34.5)
Large (above 5 acre)	0	2	1	1	1	1	2	8(4.0)
Total	12	74	53	20	12	20	9	200
Occupational Classification of Sample Households								
Self employment in agriculture and allied sector	3	23	23	11	6	8	3	77(38.5)
Self employment in non agriculture own account enterprise	4	29	20	6	3	7	3	72(36.0)
Manual casual labour/ daily wage earner	5	14	8	0	0	0	0	27(13.5)
Government employment	0	2	0	2	3	4	3	14(7)
Private employment	0	5	2	1	0	1	0	9(4.5)
Others	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1(0.5)
Total	12	74	53	20	12	20	9	200

Source: Field Survey Note: Figures in the Parentheses Indicate Percentage

The Table on main source of income shows that 38.5% of sample households make their living by being self employed in agriculture and allied sector, and 36% by being self employed in non agricultural sector while the remaining 25.5% by engaging themselves in different occupations like manual/casual labour (13.5%), government employment (7%), private employment (4.5%) and others (0.5%). Analysis of monthly family income (2014-15) of the beneficiary households indicates that only a very small proportion of workers (4%) has annual income greater than Rs.30,000 per month. So, it could be concluded that monthly family income of the significant majority i.e. 64% out of the entire sample MGNREGA workers are in the income bracket from Rs 5000 to Rs15000 per month, while 6% of them had family income below Rs.5000 per month which is not quite economically healthy. It is observed that out of 200 sample respondents, 20% are living in joint families while the remaining 80% in nuclear families. This makes evident that the nuclear family system is more popular than joint family system.

### **Role of MGNREGA in Improving the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Rural Poor at Household Level: Grounded View Points**

One of the core objectives of the scheme is to enhance the livelihood quality of rural people by providing direct benefit to households with income enhancement by means of employment generation. This section looks at the sample respondents' grounded viewpoints towards various socio-economic attributes that contribute to the enhancement of quality of life of the people under study such as (1) MGNREGA contribution to household income, (2) expenditure pattern of MGNREGA income, (3) contribution of MGNREGA to food expenditure, (4) contribution of MGNREGA to saving (5) changes in interfamilial relationship due to MGNREGA

**Table 3: Contribution Level of MGNREGS Earning Towards Family Income Generation (As Perceived by the Sample Respondents)**

Contribution level	Number of respondents	Percentage
Increased to a great extent	2	1.0
Increased somewhat	99	49.5
Remains the same/ no change	92	46.0
Can't say	7	3.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Only 1% of the sample respondents opine that their family income has increased to a great extent owing to MGNREGA earning. A moderate increase in household income due to MGNREGA earning has been perceived by 49.5% of the sample respondents. 46% of the respondents are of the view that there has been no substantial increase in their income owing to MGNREGA earning. A viewpoint of a respondent is worth mentioning in this connection. A respondent, named, Premabati, aged 43 years, living with her husband, four daughters, and two sons bearing job card number MN06-003-010-002/973 stated “MGNREGA wage cannot be considered an income as the payment of MGNREGA wage is very irregular. As continuous days of work are very short and the total amount I get at a time is very less, the income cannot lead to household asset creation nor can it be invested in any productive venture. The wage I get never reaches home. It's spent, on the way, on the grocery items or buying snacks for my children. Moreover, one job card per household is not satisfactory considering the size of my family. I was extremely happy and had lots of expectation from the scheme when I first started working under the scheme in 2008. But nowadays job card can be renamed as joker card; I don't have any expectation from it”.

**Table 4: First Priority of Item on Which Sample Households Spent Their MGNREGA Wage**

Item	Number of households	Percentage
Daily household consumption needs	105	52.5
Health	11	5.5
Education	38	19.0
Household asset	3	1.5
Social caremony	9	4.5
Jewellery/clothes	4	2.0
Saving	9	4.5
Others	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The Table 4 reveals that a significant majority of the respondents (52.5%) spent their MGNREGA income on meeting daily household consumption needs. Education is also given high priority as 19% of the sample households are reported to have spent their MGNREGA wage on children's education. The next important items in line are health (5.5%), saving (4.5%), social ceremony (4.5%), jewellery/clothes (2%) and household assets (1.5%).

As explained above MGNREGA wage has been spent mostly towards meeting the daily household consumption needs. An attempt to further investigate the respondents' opinion on contribution of MGNREGA wage towards food expenditure of the sample households has been made and the perceptions are presented in the Table below.

**Table 5: Respondents' Perception on Improvement Level in Household Food Expenditure Due to MGNREGA Earning:**

Improvement level	Number of respondents	Percentage
Significantly increased	10	5.0
Moderately increased	92	46.0
Remains same	96	48.0
Cannot say	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The Table 5 shows that 46% percent of the respondents feel that there is a moderate increase in their household food expenditure. 48% of the respondents have the opinion that their expenditure on household food item remains the same and MGNREGA had no impact on it.

**Table 6: Perception of Sample Respondents Regarding Contribution of MGNREGS Earning Towards Saving**

<b>Saving increased</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	37	18.5
No	159	79.5
Can't say	4	2.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Only 18.5 % of the sample respondents have expressed that MGNREGA contributed towards their household savings. Majority of the sample respondents (79.5%) have the impression that the earning from the scheme has no contribution towards their household saving.

Contribution of MGNREGA to family income and expenditure pattern, presented in Table 3 and 4 respectively, shows that income generated from MGNREGA is spent by the families in meeting their day to day household consumption needs. Consequently, MGNREGA have much influence on enhancing the food security of the beneficiaries. As such, the contribution of MGNREGA income towards savings is marginal as shown in Table 6.

**Table 7: Enhancing Impact of the Scheme on Education as Perceived by the Respondents**

<b>Positive impact on education</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	61	30.5
No	139	69.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

It is evident from the above Table 7 that 69.5% of the respondents feel that MGNREGA has no positive impact on education of their children while 30.5% are of the view that MGNREGA has a positive impact on their children's education. The benefits, as explained by the respondents during FGDs are indirect and in the form of the tremendous improvement in the condition of the village roads. Moreover, the bushes along the road sides are cleared from time to time. As a result their children are able to go to school either on foot or by a bicycle without the assistance of their parents. Before the coming of MGNREGA, most parents used to accompany their children to school due to fear of snakes. Women especially have expressed that income derived from the scheme is spent on the payment of school fees, private tuition fees, transportation charge and the purchase of books, uniforms and stationary items.

**Table 8: Do You Observe Any Changes in the Interfamilial Relationships Because of Your Engagement in the Scheme?**

<b>Change in interfamilial relationship</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	63	31.5
No	137	68.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Table 8 reveals that 31.5% of the respondents are of the view that engagement in MGNREGA has brought changes in their interfamilial relationships. During the FGD most women have explained that they experience an increase in cooperation among family members in completing household chores. A few women have reported that their husbands are not happy when they go for MGNREGA work since household work is left unattended. A significant majority of the respondents (68.5%) have the feeling that they did not experience any change in the interfamilial relationship.

### **Role of MGNREGA in Improving the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Rural Poor at Village Level:**

Village development works like maintenance of road, renovation of pond, drainage construction, desilting of river bed, minor irrigation works, cleaning canals, channels, and drainage and road development have been taken up by the Panchayat under MGNREGA. Benefits of these assets created have been assessed in the Table 9 given hereunder.

**Table 9: Are the Village Assets Created Under MGNREGS Useful to You?**

Assets useful	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	171	85.5
No	29	14.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

A majority of respondents (85.5%) are of the view that they get benefit from the village assets created under MGNREGA scheme while only 14.5% respondents have said that the village assets are of no use to them.

**Table 10: Respondents' Opinion towards the Impact of MGNREGS on Overall Development**

Level of development	Number of respondents	Percentage
Considerably developed	23	11.5
Somewhat developed	161	80.5
Not developed/remains the same	16	8.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

It is evident that 11.5% of the respondents have the impression that there is considerable development in the village after the implementation of MGNREGA as against 80.5% who have the feeling that there is some degree of development. However, 8% have felt that MGNREGA has no impact on the development of the village.

**Table 11: Respondents' Perception towards MGNREGS Contribution in Improving the Condition of Poor People in the Village**

Level of contribution	Number of respondents	Percentage
Improved to a great extent	2	1.0
Improved somewhat	65	32.5
Remain the same / no improvement	133	66.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Survey

Only 32.5% of the respondents have felt that introduction of MGNREGA leads to an improvement in the condition of the poor in their village to some extent. However, 66.5% of the respondents have expressed that there have been not much change in the condition of the poor people.

**Table 12: Do You Have the Following Motive Behind Your Engagement in MGNREGA?**

To get an opportunity of socialization	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	187	93.5
No	13	6.5
Total	200	100.0
With an idea of local development	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	186	93.0
No	14	7.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: field survey

It is observed that 93.5% of the respondents join the scheme with an expectation to get an opportunity of socialization with their friends and relatives and 93% with an idea of local development.

## CONCLUSION:

An analysis of the socio-economic profile of the respondents and their households reveals that MGNREGA gives opportunity to different sections of the society including marginalized sections, vulnerable groups, physically disabled, low to high income households, low to highly educated people etc. to enhance their livelihood quality. Thus, the scheme has been implemented in an inclusive manner. Monthly family income of the significant majority i.e. 63.5% of the entire sample households are between Rs 5000 to Rs15000. To sum up, the beneficiaries of MGNREGA are from poor to moderate socio-economic background and they participate in MGNREGA with a hope of enhancing their livelihoods. There has been mixed response towards impact of MGNREGA both at household and village levels. The data reveal that the impact of MGNREGA reflected upon village level infrastructure development or asset creation is felt by the individual households. No substantial household income is generated due to the scheme. Not much household physical asset has been created from the MGNREGA wage. These may be due to less number of working days and delayed wage payment. Improvement in purchasing power, though not at the optimal level, is felt. There has been not much improvement in the interfamilial relationship in social aspect. Social networking process and social interaction with mutual respect are on the rise. Human resource which remained untapped at one time has been directed to the creation of village assets useful to the villagers. The livelihood security of the villagers is improved to some extent through MGNREGA. The success of the scheme lies in the implementation of the programme in strict conformity with the objectives of the Act. MGNREGA can go a long way towards assuring the sustained social and economic development of the area under study on one hand and the villages in Manipur on the other.

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