

## Quality of Life: An Impact Assessment on NREGA Beneficiaries

**Bigi Thomas**

### Abstract

This article is based on the findings of a study on evaluation of the NREGA scheme, intended to assess the impact of this scheme on the overall quality of life of its beneficiaries by gauging different parameters associated with the improvement of overall quality of life of people such as impact on income – earning levels of each household, expenditure on food and non-food items, expenditure on education, household and cultivable assets creation by the beneficiaries, impact on social life, recreational activities and impact on distress out migration. This study also captured the views and feed-back of the beneficiaries on various facets of implementation of the scheme at grass root level right from the stage of issue of job cards till the payment of wages, social audit etc.

**Key words:** NREGA; Quality of life; Migration; Impact.

---

---

### Introduction

The attack on poverty has been sharpened and strengthened by our government by restricting and revamping income and the levels of living of the poorest of the poor by introducing MNREGA Act. The war on poverty is given priority in this Act and its main goal is to remove poverty and create fuller employment.[1] The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is poised to bring cheers to the lives of millions of rural poor with the inclusion of new works under its ambit and the convergence with other flagship programmes. Efforts are on to bring in more transparency and accountability in it with district ombudsmen being envisaged to ensure that the benefits reach out to the poor and the needy villagers.[2]

The most important factor which influences the status of a poor is employment. This was

viewed in different angles by various experts. Bishiho assumed employment as a state of being engaged in production.[3] Amarthya Sen considered employment is one which gives income to the employed, yields output and gives a person to recognition of being engaged in something worthwhile.[4]

This employment guarantee programme is primarily intended to enhance the livelihood securities of the people in rural areas by supplementing wage employment opportunities to the unskilled labor force. The programme is in force with the intention that it would act as a strong safety net for the poor in the wake of lack of alternative employment opportunities. In an attempt to ensure the rural economy to grow, the scheme is expected to regenerate the rural natural resource base for sustainable livelihood by carrying out soil and water conservation activities.

What is considered most crucial is the empowerment of the poor through the provision of a rights-based law. NREGA gives rise to programmes that develop not from its willful benevolence, but as a legally binding response by the state to a right to work that is enshrined in law. The constraint of resources cannot thus be cited by the government as an excuse for failing to provide works.[5] Quality of works is central to the implementation of this programme. There is complete abolition

---

---

**Author's Affiliation:**\*Faculty Member, Department of Social Work, S. P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat.

**Reprint's request:** Dr. Mrs. Bigi Thomas, Faculty Member, Department of Social Work, S. P. University, V.V. Nagar, Gujarat.

E-mail: bigisuresh12@rediffmail.com

(Received on 15.04.2013, accepted on 04.05.2013)

of contractors from the implementation of NREGA, thereby getting rid of rampant corruption and labour exploitation that was in vogue in earlier schemes.

The other key attributes of this scheme are time bound guarantee, labour-intensive work, decentralized participatory planning, women's empowerment, work site facilities and above all transparency and accountability through the provision of social audits and right to information. The unprecedented use of information technology in this programme is considered to bring about greater transparency through intensive monitoring and faster execution. The payment of wages through bank and post office accounts is another innovative step that is likely to reduce fudging of the muster rolls on the part of the implementing agencies since the actual payments are beyond their reach. There is an effort to separate payment agencies from implementing agencies and thereby preventing embezzlement of wages.[6]

NREGA can thus be construed as a timely intervention. Even after six decades of India's independence, the country still fails to arrest abject poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, social inequality and so on. A legally-binding rights-based programme of this kind, if implemented properly is expected to bring about a turnaround in the rural economy by eradicating all the above social menace. NREGA can improve sustainable rural livelihoods through spillover effects thereby enabling the poor manage their risks and opportunities effectively. There is no denying of the importance of policy and programme action for employment generation to ensure food security amongst poor than direct food subsidy strategies.[7]

## Methodology

With NREGA scheme India embarked on an ambitious attempt to battle poverty by guaranteeing employment to those who demand work. It also aims at transforming the rural areas by scaling up the quality of life of

people with guaranteed minimum wages and capital formation within rural economies which can redress poverty and boost overall development in the country. In this article authors highlight the impact of NREGA scheme on the overall quality of life of beneficiaries by gauging different indicators associated with the improvement of overall quality of life. The indicators assessed are impact on economic condition, purchasing power and consumption of food and non-food items, health and nutrition, education of children, household and cultivable assets creation, social life of beneficiaries in terms of their participation in social and religious programmes and organizations. This study also tried to capture the impact of the scheme to arrest out-migration, views and feed-back of the beneficiaries on various facets of implementation of the scheme at grass root level right from the stage of issue of job cards etc.[3]

### *Coverage of the study*

The study covered Anand, Kheda and Panchmahal districts of Gujarat state. The information obtained as a result of this study will be the reality situation of the extent of benefits and problems the beneficiaries of NREGA scheme are having. The analytical scope covers the fulfillment of the objectives set out and the functional scope confined to tendering a set of appropriate suggestions which can help the beneficiaries to get maximum benefits and the authorities to ensure proper implementation of the scheme.

### *Universe of the study*

The universe of the study is all the beneficiaries of NREGA scheme from Anand, Kheda and Panchmahal districts of Gujarat state.

### *Sampling*

Beneficiaries of four villages from randomly selected two blocks of the above mentioned districts have been selected as samples. The

District	Block	Villages			
Panchmahal	Kadana	Ladpur	Golanpur	Kajli	Dadaliya
	Santrapur	Godhar(west)	Machod	Panchmuva	Mohilapad
Kheda	Kapadvanj	Sunda	Abliyara	Ladpur	Ghauva
	Balasinor	Vadadla	Karanpur	Navgam	Gunthali
Anand	Umreth	Dagjipura	Gangapura	Hamidpura	Ratanpur
	Sojitra	Kothavi	Bhadkhad	Khansol	Runaj

following table shows the distribution of randomly selected two blocks and four villages from each block.

#### *Sample size*

As per Krejcie and Morgan's table the sample size is to be 1889 while considered NREGA beneficiaries list given in government website as the source list and data collection is done from 1844 beneficiaries as rest of them were either not available or not ready to participate in the study. Also a few gave incomplete responses or failed to respond properly. So 1844 is decided as sample size.

#### *Research design*

Descriptive research design method is used in this study.

#### *Tools of data collection*

1. Detailed Interview schedule is prepared to collect information from the respondents according to the objectives set by the researcher.
2. Focused Group Discussions is held with the beneficiaries.
3. Observation method is used to collect information on participation of people in gramsabha and the quality of social audit done during gramsabha.

In order to collect data trained UGC Project Fellow visited all the selected villages. Some trained Master of Social Work and Master of Human Resource Management students from Department of Social Work, Sardar Patel University, Gujarat also were involved in the data collection process and they stayed 6 days in Panchmahal and Kheda districts during data collection. This helped us to conduct focused group discussions too with the

beneficiaries of the scheme. Field visits to the work sites also were carried out.

#### *Operational definitions*

1. *Quality of Life*: Income of beneficiaries, expenditure on food, clothes, housing, education, health, recreational facilities etc are included in quality of life.

2. *Beneficiaries of NREGA scheme*: Those who have received remuneration by engaging himself or herself under this scheme.

#### **Discussion**

Findings revealed that NREGA had brought changes in the lives of beneficiaries even if there is a feeling exists among a substantial proportion of them that this changes brought by NREGA are negligible and temporary.

It is been revealed that NREGA could make a positive impact in the lives of hundreds and thousands of NAREGA beneficiaries in many areas especially in their purchasing power and consumption pattern although there are apprehensions shared by the beneficiaries themselves about its permanency. It has promoted their income and livelihood security by ensuring wage payment for 100 days of work and increasing their debt clearance capacity. Reported income before and after joining the scheme by respondents depicts the positive change brought out by NREGA in the economic condition of beneficiaries.

*Repayment of outstanding loans/ debts is been facilitated by NAREGA. Propensity to labour work, which ensures wage payment, as a mean of livelihood is evident from this study. There is an increase in acquisition of movable and immovable assets like vehicles and live stocks after the scheme reported from everywhere. Also many reported*

*that NAREGA helped them to ensure 3 meals and 2 meals daily which were otherwise not possible for them. It also helped them to enjoy the luxury of having milk, fruits, certain vegetables etc immediately after wage payment. Increase in expenditure on education in terms of books, pencils, erasers, bags, water bottles and tiffin boxes is acknowledged by majority of the respondents as a result of NREGA.*

Even if NREGA had brought the above mentioned changes in lives of beneficiaries, there is a strong feeling among the substantial proportion of them that this changes brought by NREGA are negligible and temporary. As NREGA ensures only 100 days of work, there is no continuity or security in the income and the fact is that rarely any one gets 100 days of work as there are no proper work identification and work distribution. Most often delay in payment, corruption, mismanagement; no proper recording and documentation, apathy from the administrative section etc act as defeating factors in making this scheme unpopular among rural masses.

There is no evidence from the study that NREGA could make long lasting effect in beneficiaries and communities. Expenditure pattern of beneficiaries on non food items before and after the scheme documents no significant difference in this study. When they agreed that income from NREGA enabled them to provide their children with books, pencils, erasers, water bottles etc, it could not make them able to think anything more about their children beyond "today" as their income from NREGA was not sufficient for providing any special care in education like tuition, extra learning materials etc. Still some beneficiaries, especially women shared their wish of giving continuous education to their children if their NREGA work is continued and secured.

No substantial change could be observed in the health and nutritional aspects, education and overall development of the beneficiaries and their families. NREGA failed to leave any impact in their capacity to have treatment in private hospitals, English medium education to their children, acquisition of assets like gold,

bank deposit etc. There is no doubt that possession of live stocks like cows and bullocks and vehicles like moped and cycles, as reported by beneficiaries as a result of NREGA, can be considered like long term assets. A better work environment for women is reiterated by some respondents in this study. At the same time no substantial evidence of any positive impact on migration is elicited from the present study as only few respondents informed that due to availability of job under NREGA they did not migrate to other areas in search of job.

NREGA is poised to create, generate and develop the common property resources like ponds, wells, roads, canals, other water bodies etc so that contribute towards the overall development of the area and to an extent arrest distress out migration due to drought and lack of employment in particular seasons. But in the opinion of beneficiaries under this study, this objective of NREGA is not proved to be achieved as it is reported that most of the time they were engaged in digging work and in our observations too no tangible work could be seen except some ponds, and half constructed roads where quality of these assets created is also very poor. There is serious lack of co-ordination between various departments resulted into this condition. While asked many respondents said that they are not interested in NREGA work because it is always "mitti work". This makes it clear that people never demanded for work, the very objective of this act is been defeated due to several reasons ranging from no proper information to no proper implementation.

#### *Suggestions*

*Suggestions felt on the findings of this study are presented in the following paragraphs.*

Literature available from all over India proves that a strong presence of civil body in the execution of NREGA scheme ensures its success. Their presence can contribute significantly towards its proper implementation right from ensuring demand for work by rural masses. Success of any

programme depends upon its popularity among the proposed beneficiaries. There must be implementation of strategic planning to make this scheme popular among the rural poor which are now totally absent in all the study areas in Anand, Panchmahal and Kheda districts of Gujarat state. Government should do this dissemination of information and awareness on a big way by using media of all type and involvement of NGO's, leaders, youth and people at large. Care should be taken to make people understand all the details and procedures of this scheme and what and when they have to act. This will make people feel that this is their programme and they should participate in it.

Considering the fact that the poor at the bottom, to whom the scheme basically addresses, are marginalized and weak and are not in a position to assert them unless mobilized, the role of civil society organizations becomes extremely important in mobilizing the poor for acquiring collective strength to demand work as a right and to social audit. Without this inclusion, the scheme tends to become bureaucratized (Indira Hirway, 2006).

Social planning and policy model of community organization by Rothman (2001) presupposes that change in any complex modern environment requires expert planning and policy making. Works like road construction, canal or pond making, forestation, cleaning or degeneration of water bodies etc should be taken up with clear cut objectives towards strengthening agricultural production by ensuring continuous availability of water and employment, arresting distress out migration and accelerating the pace and quality of other ongoing development schemes. Experts help in the process of conceptualizing and programme planning can contribute towards creation of assets of long lasting nature. Experts help in the implementation and evaluation stages also should be encouraged so that sustainability of the assets made can be ensured.

Much attention should be given towards capacity enhancement of all personnel

associated with this scheme. Strategic planning is needed towards the attainment of this goal among rural *poor*, the real beneficiaries of this scheme, gram panchayat members, sarpanchs, talatis, supervisors, NGO's and civil society. Success stories of this programme reported from all over the country and what changes it has brought to the development of people and communities can be shared with all so that they also should get motivated to have replication of these stories in their own areas. Government should encourage best performing districts, talukas and panchayats and sarpanchs with awards and other encouraging prizes.

Regular monitoring and strict supervision along with complete transparency in all the levels of implementation can definitely make this scheme a successful one. But what is lacking is the real attitude among all officials who are at present entrusted with all the power of execution of this scheme. People should be encourages to use their rights including right to information towards ensuring proper implementation of this scheme in their areas, something which is totally absent in the study areas. Strict implementation of punitive measures to all those caught with forging of records, misuse of funds, nonpayment of wages, inappropriate measurements of works done and any type of corruption leading to defeating the scheme should be done. Government should show the political will power to do everything so that the real purpose of this act is achieved.

Adequate number of trained manpower can decelerate the discrepancies involved in all levels of implementation of this act to an extent. Proper knowledge regarding how to calculate the piece rate will remove the misconception in people's mind that they are paid less than the market wage rate even if they work for minimum hours. Assigning enough work so that workers get guaranteed wage demands knowledge and skill from those who assign the works. Enough attention should be given to such technicalities.

One of the common complaints raised by respondents in this study is less number of job

**Table 8: Table showing impact of NREGA on the quality of life of its beneficiaries**

<b>Impact on Economic Condition</b>				
<b>Income per month after getting NREGA employment</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
< 2000	913	49.5	369	20.0
2000-5000	925	50.2	1470	79.7
No reply	06	0.3	06	0.3
<b>Details of debt if any</b>				
< 1000 Rs	462	25.1	82	4.4
1000-3000	1341	72.7	310	16.8
3000-5000	10	0.5	00	00.0
>5000 Rs	01	0.1	00	00.0
No Reply	30	1.6	1452	78.7
<b>Distribution of means of livelihood</b>				
Agricultural	221	12.0	212	11.5
Labour	721	39.1	912	49.5
Farm Labour	902	48.9	720	39.0
<b>Impact on non food items</b>				
< 500	270	14.6	170	9.2
500-800	289	15.7	389	21.1
No Reply	1285	69.60	1285	69.6
<b>Acquisition of movable assets</b>				
Livestock	1463	79.3	929	50.4
Vehicle	152	8.2	333	18.1
No reply	229	12.4	582	31.6
<b>Acquisition of non movable assets</b>				
Gold	879	47.7	879	47.7
Bank deposit	965	52.3	965	52.3
<b>Establishment of gadgets/ equipments</b>				
TV/Radio	656	35.6	656	35.6
Mobile	820	44.5	1326	71.9
<b>Renovation of house and house hold possession</b>				
Constructing bathroom	00	00.0	02	0.1
Availing potable water facility	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
Sewing machine	00	00.0	01	0.05
Grinding mill	500	27.1	678	36.8
Steel Trunk/ cupboard	00	00.0	00	00.0
Furniture	00	00.0	02	00.0
<b>Purchase of vehicle</b>				
Cycle	250	13.6	25	1.4
Moped	103	5.6	159	8.6
Tractor	436	23.6	218	11.8
Cart/Cow	315	17.1	417	22.6
No Vehicle	473	25.7	445	24.1
No Reply	267	14.5	580	31.5

<b>Impact on Health and Nutritional Condition</b>				
<b>Capable of having meals per day on regular basis</b>				
3 meals	866	46.9	984	53.3
2 meals	1600	86.7	1699	92.1
<b>capable of consuming nutritious food</b>				
Milk	540	29.2	600	32.5
Green vegetables	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
Seasonal fruits	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
<b>capable of purchasing</b>				
Spices	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
Pulses	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
Oil for cooking	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
<b>capable of giving treatment to family members</b>				
PHCs	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
Government hospitals	1400	75.9	1400	75.9
Pvt hospitals	50	2.7	50	2.7
<b>Impact on Education of Children</b>				
<b>capable of sending boy to school for</b>				
Primary education	1060	57.4	1100	59.6
Secondary education	320	17.3	350	18.9
<b>capable of sending girl to school for</b>				
Primary education	1040	56.3	1042	56.5
Secondary education	350	18.9	350	18.9
<b>capable of sending children to</b>				
Government school	1844	100	1844	100.0
Private school	00	0.0	00	0.0
<b>capable of sending children to</b>				
Gujarati medium school	1844	100.0	1844	100.0
English medium school	00	0.0	00	0.0
<b>Capable of giving special attention/care in the form of</b>				
Private tuitions	00	0.0	00	0.0
Book/Pencil/Eraser	1500	81.3	1520	82.4
Bag/ waterbottle/ tiffin box	500	27.1	820	44.4
Providing higher education	30	1.6	35	1.8
Finding an employed groom for daughter	25	1.3	30	1.6
Making a house	120	6.5	120	6.5
<b>Impact on Recreational Activities</b>				
<b>able to celebrate without taking loan</b>				
Festivals	00	100.0	50	2.7
Ritualistic ceremonies	120	6.5	150	8.1
Going to pilgrim	00	00.0	00	00.0
Watching cinema	745	40.4	917	49.7
<b>Impact on Social Life</b>				
<b>Membership in the organisations</b>				
Gram Sabha	250	13.5	1600	18.7
Cultural Groups	150	8.1	160	8.6
Religious groups	150	8.1	162	8.7
Mohalla committee	28	1.5	30	1.6
Farmers organisation	02	0.1	02	0.1
Workers organisation	04	0.2	05	0.2
Co-operative societies	20	1.0	24	1.3
Self Help Groups	312	16.9	323	17.5
Youth Club	50	2.7	56	3.0
Mahila mandal	312	16.9	323	17.5

availed days and delayed payment. So every possible measure should be taken to have a hike in number of work days and regular payment. Only continuity in job clubbed with regular payment throughout the year to every individual who is ready to work only can guarantee any positive impact on the overall quality of life of beneficiaries of this scheme. Unless and until we address these long term goals and sustainable aspects of development of this scheme, NREGA will continue to enjoy the present lukewarm response only as a tool for empowerment of rural masses. Impact of MGNREGA can be maximized if it is implemented in the areas where it is most needed, at a substantial scale, and with strict adherence to the MGNREGA protocol, in letter and in spirit (Gaur and Chandel 2010); (<http://nrega.nic.in/netnrega/home.aspx>).

#### References

1. Gogana Anita. Special employment guarantee and poverty alleviation programme. New Delhi: New Century Publication; 2007, 142-153.
2. Ram K Verma. Policy approach to rural development.
3. NREGA to change the face of rural India. *Kurushetra*. 2009; 57(12): 54.
4. Amarthiyasen. Employment in situation and technology some policy issues. *International Labour Review*. 1975; 112: 45-72.
5. Ambasta, Pramathesh, P S, Vijay Shankar and MihirShah (2008): "Two Years of NREGA: The Road Ahead", *Economic & Political Weekly*, 43(8), pp 41-50.
6. Aanaik, A and Siddhartha (2008: 1): 'Bank Payments:End o? Corruption in NREGA?', *Economic & Politi-cal Weekly*, May 2.- (2008: 2): 'NRE
7. Von Braun, J. ed. 1995. *Employment for Poverty Reduction and Food Security* Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/oc32.pdf>.