

MGNREGA: The genesis and performance in West Bengal

1.INTRODUCTION:

Poverty and unemployment have been the bane of India for long, their reduction has been one of the major goals of India's development planning from the very beginning of the planning era in 1951-52 and the planning process has been sensitive to the needs of the poor. Actually, economic growth, promotion of human development and targeted programmes of poverty alleviation have comprised the three-pronged strategy of Government of India to empower people to address the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.¹

The composition of the poor has been changing and rural poverty is getting concentrated in agricultural labour and artisanal households and urban poverty in casual labour households. The total number of agricultural workers in India has been estimated at 259 million as of 2004-05. They form 57 per cent of the workers in the total workforce. About 249 million of them are in rural areas and that works out to 73 percent of the total rural workforce of 343 million. Their share in total rural unorganised sector employment is 96 per cent while in unorganized agricultural sector it is 98 per cent. ² The labour force in year 2006 has grown up to 509.3 million out of which 60% are in agriculture, 12% are employed in industries and the residual 28% are in services.

Moreover, as the workforce continues to grow, the earning situation becomes more acute not only for the landless, who always lacked the possibility of subsistence farming, but gets worse also for those owning land. Their available land plots decrease from generation to generation and the share of landowning farmers holding less than 1 hectare of land has risen. As a consequence, landowners, in order to supplement their income, have increasingly joined the landless, in seeking wage labour. Since the low-skilled are widely barred from the formal sector (which accounts for only 14% of total employment), this intensifies the competition for informal jobs, thereby weakening the bargaining power of job seekers and abetting precarious employment without steady and reliable income flows or basic labour protection.

¹Menon Sudha(edited), 'National Rural Employment Guarantee Act: Issues, Challenges and Experiences, Icfai University Press, Agartala,Tripura,2008

²Report on "Conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the Unorganised Sectors" by National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector, available at www.nceuis.nic.in

The employment days for agricultural wage labourers is characterised by great degree of uncertainty because of seasonality of manual operations such as sowing, weeding, harvesting etc. in crop cultivation. There could be ups and downs in employment days depending on the agricultural performance during the year. Years when agriculture has been good and monsoon has been appropriate employment days would be higher and vice-versa. However, between 1993-94 and 2004-05 there was a secular decline in the number of days of wage employment available to agricultural labourers, from 224 to 209.³

Accordingly, Government of India has launched various programmes from time to time aimed at poverty alleviation and unemployment, and creating adequate livelihood opportunities for the poor through provision of employment and public services. In 1999 the targeted poverty alleviation programmes were clubbed together into four broad categories:

- Self employment programmes
- Wage-employment programmes
- Area Development (like Drought Prone Area Programme and Desert Development Programme)
- Minimum Needs (like Indira Awas Yojana, Programmes on Sanitation etc.)

Though these programmes had a favourable impact on the country's poverty indices, there still exists an ardent need to reach the benefits fully to the relatively less privileged classes of the society so that they become able to acquire the basic capabilities needed to live a reasonably better life. There are 238.50 million Indians living Below the Poverty Line, among them 170.30 million still lives in rural areas. According to India's official poverty line of a monthly per capita consumption of 356 rupees in rural and 593 rupees in urban areas, 300 million Indians are officially poor. In absolute numbers this is not much lower than the figures thirty years ago, yet the share of the poor as a percentage of the total population has steadily dropped from 55% in the early 70's to 28% in 2005. However, the unchangeable factor is the deep-rootedness of poverty in rural areas where three-quarters of the poor live.⁴

The main reason for the vast poverty in rural areas lies in the continued economic dependence on agriculture. Of the rural poor, 41% are informal agricultural labourers and 22% are self-employed farmers. This also affects urban poverty as most poor households in the cities are distressed migrants from rural areas with stagnating farming incomes⁵. About 52% of India's labour force is absorbed

³ NSS 61st Round 2004-2005, Employment-Unemployment Survey. Computed.

⁴ Indian Planning Commission, 2008a

⁵ Planning Commission, 2008b

in Agriculture but its contribution is less than one fifth to the country's Gross Domestic Product⁶. The overwhelming dependence on a sector where productivity continues to fall behind the rest of the economy contributes to growing inequality between rural and urban areas. The main reason for low agricultural productivity lies in excess number of (underemployed) farming labour. Despite unprecedented economic growth rates of almost 9% in recent years (since 2003 onwards), the manufacturing sector has not generated enough employment opportunities to absorb the underemployed workforce and its share in total employment is still lower than 20%⁷. Meanwhile, the creation of new jobs in the agricultural sector has slowed down considerably, from 1.8% annually between 1983 and 1994 to 0.4% between 1994 and 2005⁸.

2. POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME THROUGH WAGE EMPLOYMENT:

India is the world's largest democracy. In the last decade, the growth rate of India's Gross Domestic Product has been around 7%. However, India also contains more poor people than any other country. The Planning Commission estimates of head-count ratios for consumption poverty are around 23.6% in urban areas and 27.1% in rural areas, but other estimates using the same data rise to 34.6% and 45.3% respectively⁹. Within this 'great debate', the rural poor are generally understood to be worst off. Many argue their situation is worsening. For instance, one recent analysis found that although official data estimate that the percentage of rural households below the income poverty line has fallen from 45.65% in 1993 to 27.9% in 2000, other estimates suggest that the percentage of rural people consuming less than 90% of the required calories has risen from 40.9% to 45.2% over the same period¹⁰. Employment growth accelerated to 2.6% during 1999-2005 outpacing population growth. But the average daily status unemployment rate, which had increased from 6.1% in 1993-94 to 7.3% in 1999-00, increased further to 8.3% in 2004-05. This was because the working age population grew faster than total population and labour force participation rates increased, particularly among women. Official estimates of unemployment among agricultural labour households have increased from 9.5% in 1993-1994 to 15.3% in 2004-2005¹¹.

⁶ Ravi &Engler 2009

⁷ Ministry of Finance, 2008

⁸ Planning Commission, 2008

⁹ http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/downloads/FP2P/FP2P_India_Nat_%20Rural_Emp_Gtee_Act_CS_ENGLISH.pdf

¹⁰ Macroscan Features, 2003, 'The Calorie Consumption Puzzle'. Available at http://www.macroscan.org/fet/feb03/print/prnt110203Calorie_Puzzle.htm

¹¹ Planning Commission, 2007, *Towards Faster and More Inclusive Growth: Approach Paper to the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012)*. New Delhi: Government of India. Page 72.

The reports of 'rural distress' abound in India's vibrant media. Many concern farmer suicides, usually on the part of smallholder farmers who cannot maintain their agricultural practices in the face of rising input and credit costs and uncertainties in yield and market prices. Others address a separate (though related) phenomenon, starvation deaths resulting from inadequate employment, poverty, and the failure of subsistence production during droughts. These latter reports have been particularly prevalent in Rajasthan, which endured a drought from 1998 to 2004, and where a strong network of civil society organisations (the Akal Sangharsh Samiti and the Right to Food campaign) has publicized the matter.

The activist network has also emphasised the government's failure to prevent starvation both through its food distribution and its employment programmes. The NHRC Orissa Starvation Deaths Proceedings dated 17th Jan, 2003 highlighted the following Constitutional guarantees: "*Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees a fundamental right to life and personal liberty. In the view of the Commission, the Right to Food is inherent to a life with dignity, and Article 21 should be read with Articles 39(a) and 47 to understand the nature of the obligations of the State in order to ensure the effective realisation of this right. Article 39(a) of the Constitution, enunciated as one of the Directive Principles, fundamental in the governance of the country, requires the State to direct its policy towards securing that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means to livelihood*"¹². As part of this advocacy, the People's Union for Civil Liberties submitted a Public Interest Litigation on the 'Right to Food' to the Supreme Court in 2001. The Supreme Court has, as a result, issued various directives ordering the government to improve the performance of its programmes. The Supreme Court's favourable opinion encouraged activists to increase the intensity and scope of their demands for improved government programmes.

Shifting the focus from the national level to the state level it is found that in comparison with the other states of India, in terms of per-capita State Domestic Product (SDP), West Bengal had been the richest state in India in 1960, but by the end of last millennium, the SDP per-capita rank of the state declined to ninth. At the time of independence (1947) the share of the state in the total industrial production of the country had been 24%. In 2005 it has been reduced to 4.6% which has pulled the State at the bottom cluster among the 17 big states.¹³ In spite of registering good performance in agriculture in the past, in

¹² Orissa Starvation Deaths Proceedings dated 17th Jan, 2003 available at <http://nhrc.nic.in/impdirections.htm#37/3/97-LD>

¹³ (Economic Census 2005)

recent years, the agricultural growth rate has also declined along with a sharp fall in productivity. In terms of the latest Human Development Report (2005), West Bengal has been placed at 10th position among 17 major states of India.¹⁴

Compounding this situation, for small peasants, agriculture is now becoming unremunerative and sizable section of the rural workforce is being pushed out from agriculture. At the same time, small enterprises are hardly able to absorb the surplus labour even when the wage rate remains depressed. Although work participation in West Bengal has increased between 1991 and 2001, this is largely accounted for by an increase in the marginal workforce coupled with a fall in the main workforce from 51.18 % in 1991 to 46% in 2001.¹⁵ This trend is declining even more in recent times unlike the other big states like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu etc.¹⁶ The rise in work participation with significant fall in main workforce percentage implies that new jobs must have been created mostly outside the organized sector of the economy and thereby creating greater vulnerability for the workforce as a whole. The dismal performance in the non-farming enterprise sector (both rural and urban), relatively higher contribution of primary sector in the Gross SDP (as compared to similar states,) and the decline in growth and productivity of this sector, displays the vulnerable status of the workforce in terms of livelihood and employability in West Bengal.

Against this background, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme built on the previous initiative of Government of Maharashtra in early seventies- the Maharashtra Rural Employment Guarantee Programme introduced for poverty alleviation through “workfare” approach. Thus the launching of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, on September 7,2005 (NREGA), recognising the ‘right to get work’ as a legal right, have considerable economic, social and political significance. The Act not only targets in relieving rural households of poverty and hunger by ensuring employment, income and livelihood support but also has raised enthusiasm among the stakeholders of rural development for its distinctive features of statutory time bound provision for providing employment, demand based approach (for people irrespective of economic categorisation such as APL or BPL), shift of focus from the volume of work to be done to the extent of employment actually to be generated, priority on accountability and transparency and compensation (in the form of unemployment allowance) in case of non-provision of employment and creation of productive assets at the village level. NREGA as a people’s

¹⁴ Human Development Report, West Bengal,2005

¹⁵ (Census 1991 and 2001)

¹⁶ (Economic census 2005)

Act demands to be implemented in the spirit intended by ensuring transparency and vigilance, people's participation, monitoring and evaluation and public accountability.¹⁷

THE OBJECTIVES:

The 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.

THE GOALS:

The goals of NREGA are as follows:

- a. Strong social safety net for the vulnerable groups by providing a fall-back employment source, when other employment alternatives are scarce or inadequate.
- b. Growth engine for sustainable development of an agricultural economy through the process of providing employment on works that address causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation and soil erosion, the Act seeks to strengthen the natural resource base of rural livelihood and create durable assets in rural areas with the potential to transform the geography of poverty
- c. Empowerment of rural poor through the processes of a rights-based Law
- d. New ways of doing business, as a model of governance reform anchored on the principles of transparency and grass root democracy

Thus, NREGA fosters conditions for inclusive growth ranging from basic wage security and recharging rural economy to a transformative empowerment process of democracy.

THE COVERAGE:

At present 596 districts are being covered in the country. Initially the Act was notified in 200 districts in the first phase with effect from February 2nd 2006 and then extended to additional 130 districts in the financial year 2007-2008. The remaining 266 districts have been notified under the NREGA with effect from April 1st,2008. Thus NREGA covers the entire country with the exception of districts that have a hundred percent urban population.

PARADIGM SHIFT FROM WAGE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES

¹⁷*The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA):Some Reports from the Field,2007*, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development, Government of India, New Delhi

NREGA marks a paradigm shift from all precedent wage employment programmes. The significant aspects of this paradigm shift are captured below:

- i) NREGA provides a statutory guarantee of wage employment.
- ii) It provides a rights-based framework for wage employment. Employment is dependent upon the worker exercising the choice to apply for registration, obtain a Job Card, and seek employment for the time and duration that the worker wants
- iii) There is a 15 day time limit for fulfilling the legal guarantee of providing employment
- iv) The legal mandate of providing employment in a time bound manner is underpinned by the provision of Unemployment Allowance.
- v) The Act is designed to offer an incentive structure to the States for providing employment as ninety percent of the cost for employment provided is borne by the Centre. There is a concomitant disincentive for not providing employment as the States then bear the double indemnity of unemployment and the cost of unemployment allowance.
- vi) Unlike the earlier wage employment programmes that were allocation based. NREGA is demand driven. Resource transfer under NREGA is based on the demand for employment and this provides another critical incentive to States to leverage the Act to meet the employment needs of the poor.
- vii) NREGA has extensive inbuilt transparency safeguards
 - a. Documents: Job Cards recording entitlements (in the custody of workers) written application for employment, Muster Rolls, Measurement Books and Asset Registers
 - b. Processes: Acceptance of employment application, issue of dated receipts, time bound work allocation and wage payment, Citizen Information Boards at worksites, Vigilance Monitoring Committees, regular block, district and state level inspections and social audits
- viii) The public delivery system has been made accountable, as it envisages an Annual Report on the outcomes of NREGA to be presented by the Central Government to the Parliament and to the Legislature by the State Government. Specifically personnel responsible for implementing the Act have been made legally responsible for delivering the guarantee under the Act.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF MGNREGS IN WEST BENGAL:

The West Bengal Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was framed to provide employment as per Section 4(1) of the National Rural employment Guarantee Act, September, 2005. The WBREGS came into force from February, 2006. It was enforced in different parts of the states in three phases.

The members of families willing to participate in the scheme were provided registration followed by issuance of job cards. The number of job cards issued by the end of the year 2009-10 has been 103,51,947. This shows that issue of job cards has increased by 7,95,880 in comparison to 95,56,067 job cards issued till 2008-09 indicating that more and more people are attracted towards this programme. The district wise number of families living in rural areas as per the rural household survey conducted in the year 2005 and the number of families registered under the Act is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of Household and those who got registered under MGNREGA During 2009-10

District	Total HH as per HH Survey (lakh)	No. of HH who got registered (lakh)	% of Rural HH got registered	Household Demanding Employment (lakh)		Household Provided Employment (lakh)	
				2008-09	2009-10	2008-09	2009-10
Jalpaiguri	6.73	6.13	90.59	2.22	2.50	2.22	2.50
Uttar Dinajpur	4.90	4.36	88.89	0.57	0.72	0.57	0.72
Dakshin Dinajpur	3.65	2.70	73.94	0.70	0.56	0.70	0.56
Malda	6.62	5.65	85.26	0.96	1.39	0.96	1.39
Murshidabad	11.57	9.68	83.66	1.84	3.71	1.84	3.66
South 24 Pgs.	12.38	7.74	62.53	1.35	1.38	1.28	1.38
Paschim Midnapur	10.04	7.90	77.93	3.20	3.43	3.20	3.43
Bankura	5.98	5.63	86.71	2.05	2.21	2.04	2.21
Purulia	5.02	4.28	84.79	1.24	1.65	1.24	1.65
Birbhum	6.54	6.37	97.45	1.86	2.34	1.86	2.34
Cooch Behar	5.98	5.76	96.29	2.29	2.05	2.27	2.04
Darjeeling GHC	1.26	1.00	79.50	0.40	0.56	0.39	0.53
Siliguri MP.	1.09	0.77	69.99	0.29	0.24	0.29	0.24
Nadia	8.62	6.90	79.49	1.16	1.81	1.16	1.81
North 24 Pgs.	10.48	6.66	61.14	1.69	2.24	1.63	2.24

Hooghly	8.17	6.95	85.04	1.49	1.97	1.49	1.97
Purba Midnapur	8.48	6.28	73.74	2.67	2.23	2.61	2.23
Burdwan	11.12	8.87	78.79	4.12	3.29	4.12	3.29
Howrah	5.31	2.09	38.89	0.36	0.56	0.36	0.56
Total:>>	133.94	105.72	78.93	30.45	34.85	30.24	34.76

The districts which are more urbanized and those areas of such districts which are within the jurisdiction of Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, have comparatively low demand for registration as well as employment.

Based on the demand for work for at least ten registered persons, a scheme may be taken up at the Gram Panchayat level as per the NREG Act. Out of 34.85 lakh households demanding employment, 34.75 lakh households were provided with work in the year 2009-2010. Demand for employment increased from 30.45 lakhs in 2008-09 to 34.85 lakh in 2009-10. Out of the thirteen districts where demand for employment increased compared to previous year, the achievements of the districts of Malda, Murshidabad, Birbhum and North 24 Parganas are higher in this respect. In general, the demand for employment for regions around Kolkata is lower for obvious reasons. West Bengal ranks eighth among all states of the country in terms of demand for employment. Rajasthan heads the list with a demand for employment of 63.11 lakh number of households. The district wise position of employment demanded and employment provided is shown in Table 1.

3.1 ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT:

The intention of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is to provide a basic employment guarantee in rural areas. The Act indicates the kinds of works that may be taken up for this purpose. As per Schedule I of the Act, the focus of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) shall be on the following works:

- (i) water conservation and rain water harvesting;
- (ii) drought proofing, including afforestation and tree plantation;
- (iii) irrigation canals, including micro and minor irrigation works;

- (iv) provision of irrigation facility, plantation, horticulture, land development to land owned by households belonging to the SC/ST, or to land of the beneficiaries of land reforms, or to land of the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana/BPL families
- (v) renovation of traditional water bodies, including de-silting of tanks;
- (vi) land development;
- (vii) flood-control and protection works, including drainage in waterlogged areas;
- (viii) rural connectivity to provide all-weather access. The construction of roads may include culverts where necessary, and within the village area may be taken up along with drains. Care should be taken not to take up roads included in the PMGSY network under NREGA. No cement concrete roads should be taken up under NREGA. Priority should be given to roads that give access to SC/ST habitations;
- (ix) any other work that may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government.

THE SPECIAL CASES:

The above list of permissible works represents the initial thrust areas. In some circumstances, locations or seasons, it may be difficult to guarantee employment within this initial list of permissible works. In such circumstances, the State Governments may make use of Section 1(ix) of Schedule I, whereby new categories of work may be added to the list on the basis of consultations between the State Governments and the Central Government. Proposals for new categories of work should be discussed and approved in the State Employment Guarantee Council before reference to the Ministry of Rural Development. Justification for recommending the new category of works should be clearly stated. District Perspective Plans must have been made that reflect an exhaustive exercise in exploring all possibilities of feasible permissible works as the basis for recommending new category of work to meet labour demand.

If the Central Government wishes to notify a new category of work it will refer the proposal to the State Governments whose responses must be sent within a month.

The maintenance of assets created under the Scheme (including protection of afforested land) will be considered as permissible work under NREGA. The same applies to the maintenance of assets created under other programmes but belonging to the sectors of works approved in Schedule I of the Act (see above).

NREGA resources should not be used for land acquisition. Land belonging to small and marginal farmers or SC/ST landowners cannot be acquired or donated for works under the programme.

STAKEHOLDERS:

The effective implementation of NREGS requires successful discharge of responsibilities of the key stakeholders. They are the:

- i) Wage seekers
- ii) Gram Sabha
- iii) PRIs, specially the gram panchayat
- iv) Programme Officer at the block level
- v) District Programme Coordinator
- vi) State Government
- vii) Ministry of Rural Development

VILLAGE LEVEL

Wage Seekers:

The wage seekers are the primary stake holders of the Act. Their exercise of choice to demand employment is the trigger of key processes. The rights of the wage seekers are:

- i) Application for registration
- ii) Obtaining a Job Card
- iii) Application for work
- iv) Choice of time and duration of the work applied for
- v) Provision of work within fifteen days of application
- vi) Provision of crèche, drinking water, first aid facilities on work site
- vii) The right to check their Muster Rolls and to get information regarding their employment entered in their Job Cards
- viii) Payment of wages within fifteen days of work done
- ix) The right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought

Gram Sabha (GS): The Gram Sabha has been given the following rights and responsibilities under the Act

- i) It will recommend works to be taken up under NREGS
- ii) It will conduct social audits on implementation of the Scheme
- iii) In addition, it is suggested that the Gram Sabha be used extensively as a forum for sharing information about the Scheme.

Gram Panchayat (GP): The Gram Panchayat is the pivotal body for implementation at the village level. Where Part Nine of the Constitution does not apply, local councils/authorities as mandated by the State concerned will be invested with corresponding responsibilities.

The Gram Panchayat is responsible for the following activities:

- i) Planning of works
- ii) Receiving applications for registration
- iii) Verifying registration applications
- iv) Registering households
- v) Issuing Job Cards
- vi) Receiving applications for employment
- vii) Issuing dated receipts,
- viii) Allotting employment within fifteen days of application
- ix) Executing works
- x) Maintaining records
- xi) Convening the Gram Sabha for social audit
- x) Monitoring the implementation of the Scheme at the village level.

BLOCK LEVEL

Panchayat Samity: The Panchayat Samity will be responsible for the consolidation of the GP plans at the Block level into a Block Plan and for monitoring and supervision.

Programme Officer (PO): The Programme Officer essentially acts as a coordinator for NREGS at the Block level. The chief responsibility of the Programme Officer is to ensure that anyone who applies for work gets employment within 15 days. A Programme Officer's other important functions are:

- i) Scrutinizing the annual development plan proposed by the GPs
- ii) Including the proposals of the Panchayat Samity
- iii) Consolidating all proposals into the block plan and submitting it to the Panchayat Samity
- iv) Matching employment opportunities with the demand for work at the Block level;
- v) Monitoring and supervising implementation
- vi) Disposal of complaints
- vii) Ensuring that social audits are conducted by the Gram Sabhas and following up on them
- viii) Payment of unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided on time

The Programme Officer is accountable to the District Programme Coordinator.

DISTRICT LEVEL

Zilla Parishads: Zilla Parishads will be responsible for finalizing the District Plans and the Labour Budget and for monitoring and supervising the Employment Guarantee Scheme in the District.

District Programme Coordinator (DPC): The State Government has designated the District Magistrate & the District Collector and the ex-officio Executive Officer, Zilla Parishads as the District Programme Coordinator (DPC). The overall responsibility for ensuring that the Scheme is implemented according to the Act belongs to the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) at the District level.

A District Programme Coordinator will be responsible for:

- i) Information dissemination
- ii) Training
- iii) Consolidating block plans into a district plan
- iv) Ensuring administrative and technical approvals to the shelf of projects has been accorded on time
- iii) Release and utilization of funds
- iv) Ensuring hundred percent monitoring of works, Muster Roll Verifications,
- v) Submission of Monthly Progress Reports.

3.2 PROCEDURE FOR ACCESSING BENEFITS UNDER MGNREGS:

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) will be open to all rural households in the areas notified by the Central Government. The entitlement of 100 days of guaranteed employment in a financial year is in terms of a household. This entitlement of 100 days per year can be shared within the household; more than one person in a household can be employed (simultaneously or at different times). All adult members of the household who register may apply for work.

To register,

they have to:

- a) Be local residents: 'Local' implies residing within the Gram Panchayat. This includes those that may have migrated some time ago but may return
- b) Be willing to do unskilled manual work
- c) Apply as a household at the local Gram Panchayat

'Household' will mean a nuclear family comprising mother, father, and their children, and may include any person wholly or substantially dependent on the head of the family. Household will also mean a single-member family.

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION

The application for registration may be given on plain paper/form to the local Gram Panchayat. It should contain the names of those adult members of the household who are willing to do unskilled manual work, and particulars such as age, sex and SC/ST status etc.

An individual may appear personally and make an oral request for registration.

- Verification of applications will be regarding local residence in the Gram Panchayat concerned, the household as an entity, and the fact that applicants are adult members of the household. The purpose of the Gram Sabha is to explain the provisions of the Act, mobilize applications for registration and conduct verifications.
- A door-to-door survey may also be undertaken to identify persons willing to register under the Act.
- To allow maximum opportunities to families that may migrate, registration will be open throughout the year at the Gram Panchayat office during working hours.
- The process of verification shall be completed as early as possible, and in any case, not later than a fortnight after the receipt of the application in the Gram Panchayat.
- After verification, the Gram Panchayat will enter all particulars in the Registrations Register in the Gram Panchayat.
- Every registered household will be assigned a unique registration number.
- A Gram Sabha of registered workers must be held.

JOB CARDS

- The Gram Panchayat will issue Job Cards to every registered household. The timely issue of well-designed Job Cards is essential; this is a critical legal document, which also helps to ensure transparency and protect labourers against fraud.
- The Job Card should be issued immediately after verification, i.e. within a fortnight of the application for registration. Job cards should be issued in the presence of the local community.
- Photographs of adult members who are applicants have to be attached to the job cards. The cost of the Job Cards, including that of the photographs is borne as part of the programme cost.
- The Job Card will be in the custody of the household to whom it is issued.
- The Job Card shall be valid for a period of five years and will have provision for the addition/deletion of members eligible to work. Deletions in any household on account of demise, or permanent change of residence of a member, are to be reported immediately by the household concerned. Additions desired may be applied for by the household. The Gram Panchayat will also

undertake an annual updating exercise in the same manner as registration, the time for which should be fixed keeping in mind the work and migration season of the local workforce.

- All additions and deletions made in the Registrations Register will be read out in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Panchayat will send a list of additions/deletions to the Programme Officer.
- A cardholder may apply for a duplicate Job Card if the original card is lost or damaged. The application will be given to the Gram Panchayat and shall be processed in the manner of a new application, with the difference being that the particulars may also be verified using the duplicate copy of the Job Card maintained by the Panchayat.

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

If a person has a grievance against the non-issuance of a Job Card, he/she may bring the matter to the notice of the Programme Officer. If the grievance is against the Programme Officer, he/she may bring it to the notice of the District Programme Coordinator or the designated grievance-redressal authority at the Block or District level. All such complaints shall be disposed off within 15 days.

APPLICATION FOR WORK

- Applications for work should generally be submitted to the Gram Panchayat. Applications should be given in writing and should include: the registration number of the Job Card; the date from which employment is required; and the number of days of employment required.
- The Application for employment may be on plain paper or it may be in a printed proforma that will be made available free of cost at the Gram Panchayat.
- A single application may be given for a number of days in different periods during the year for which employment is required. 'Joint applications' may also be submitted by several applicants. The applicant may present himself in the GP office to indicate willingness for work. This will be recorded by Gram Rozgar Sahayak in the prescribed application form and employment register. A worker having a job card may apply for work on work-site. His name may be entered in the Muster Roll by the Mate. Gram Rozgar Sahayak may make corresponding entries in the application form. This will encourage workers to get work without having to formally articulate their demand for work. The lack of formal application form should not be a ground for denying work. This is also the spirit of the law.

TIME-BOUND EMPLOYMENT

The Gram Panchayat/Programme Officer shall be responsible for providing wage employment to the applicant within 15 days of the date of receipt of the application in the case of advance applications,

employment will be provided from the date that employment has been sought, or within 15 days of the date of application, whichever is later.

If a Gram Panchayat is unable to provide employment within 15 days, it will be the responsibility of the Programme Officer to do so. The employment allotted by the Programme Officer will be intimated to the Gram Panchayat and vice versa.

If upon receiving a request for work, an Implementing Agency directed by the Programme Officer does not start work on time, or does not employ the persons directed to it for work by the Gram Panchayat, the Programme Officer will make alternative arrangements to ensure employment for those applicants.

PAYMENT OF WAGES

Every person working under the Scheme shall be entitled to wages at the minimum wage rate fixed by the State Government.

Equal wages shall be paid to both men and women workers, and the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 shall be complied with.

- The State Government may provide for a portion of the wages to be paid to the labourers on a daily basis during the period of employment.
- It is recommended that wages should be paid on a weekly basis on a pre-specified day of the week in each Gram Panchayat. Details of wages paid through the banks/Post Office network should be made public.
- It is essential to ensure that wages are paid on time. Workers are entitled to being paid on a weekly basis, and in any case within a fortnight of the date on which work was done (NREGA, Section 3(3)). In the event of any delay in wage payments, workers are entitled to compensation as per the provisions of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936 (NREGA, Schedule II, Section 30). Compensation costs shall be borne by the State Government..

PAYMENT OF WAGES THROUGH BANKS AND POST OFFICES

All payments of NREGA wages through Banks (or Post Offices) are a useful means of separating payment agencies from implementing agencies. While introducing Bank/Post office payments, attention should be paid to the following issues:

- i) Bank /Post Office accounts should be opened pro-actively on behalf of all concerned labourers by an appropriate authority (e.g. Bank or Gram Panchayat). Labourers should not be required to open their own Bank account.

- ii) A considered choice needs to be made between “individual accounts” (for each NREGA labourer) and “joint accounts” (one for each Job Card). If joint accounts are used, the different household members (e.g. husband and wife) should be co-signatories. Special care should be taken to avoid crediting household earnings to individual accounts held by the male household head (leaving women with no control over their earnings).
- iii) Special awareness and outreach activities should be conducted to ensure that all labourers (including women) are able to handle Bank procedures, especially in areas where they are unfamiliar with the banking system.
- iv) The type of Banks to be allowed (e.g. rural bank, cooperatives, nationalized, Post office, mobile banks for inaccessible areas) should be selected in the light of local conditions, with a view to ensuring smooth and timely payments. For instance, it often helps if the labourers’ accounts are held in the same Bank as the Gram Panchayat account. If inter-Bank transfers are involved, they should be simplified as much as possible.
- v) Full cooperation of the relevant Banks should be sought before Bank payments are introduced, bearing in mind their own concerns (e.g. shortage of staff). As far as possible, Bank charges should be avoided.
- vi) Gram Panchayats should be given clear instructions on the procedures involved in Bank payments.
- vii) There should be clarity about who is responsible for opening Bank accounts (e.g. labourer, Bank, Gram Panchayat). Care should be taken to avoid excluding any labourers because they are unable to get a Bank account opened.
- viii) Banks should be requested to open the accounts for NREGA labourers, without charge.
- ix) Separate individual accounts for women members of the household may be opened in the case of male headed households.

INFORMATION, EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION (IEC) of NREGA

- Awareness generation through Information, Education and Communication (IEC) about the Act and Scheme is essential.
- The awareness generation included an intensive exercise to publicise the key provisions and procedures to be followed like the process of registration, demand for employment, unemployment allowance, grievance redressal and social audit.
- This IEC targeted workers, rural households, PRIs and paid special attention to deprived areas and marginalized communities.

- The IEC Plan was drawn up to develop communication material designed to help people articulate their demand and claim their entitlements.
- Information is widely disseminated, especially in remote areas, SC/ST hamlets through TV, radios, films, print media including vernacular newspapers, pamphlets, brochures etc.

3.3 PLANNING UNDER MGNREGS:

Planning is critical to the successful implementation of the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. A key indicator of success is the timely generation of employment within 15 days while ensuring that the design and selection of works are such that good quality assets are developed. The need to act within a time limit necessitates advance planning. The basic aim of the planning process is to ensure that the District is prepared well in advance to offer productive employment on demand.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Section 16 (3) (4) of the Act states that every Gram panchayat shall prepare a development plan and maintain a shelf of works and forward it to the Programme Officer for scrutiny and preliminary approval prior to the commencement of the year in which it is proposed.

The Development Plan is an Annual Work Plan that should comprise a shelf of projects for each village with administrative and technical approvals so that works can be started as soon as there is a demand for work. The Development Plan will be like a rolling plan, since the approved shelf of projects may carry over from one financial year to the next.

The Development Plan will include the following components:

- i) Assessment of labour demand
- ii) Identification of works to meet the estimated labour demand
- iii) Estimated Cost of works and wages
- iv) Benefits expected in terms of employment generated and physical improvements (water conservation, land productivity),

THE PREPARATION OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN:

The guiding principles for preparing the development plan are as follows:

- i) The number of works in the shelf of projects in a village should be adequately more than the estimated demand.

- ii) The plot numbers of the sites where works are to be executed should be mentioned, so that each work has a unique location code.
- iii) Outcomes expected from the works should be stated in terms of :
 - a) Estimated benefits in terms of employment generated measurable in person days
 - b) Physical improvement envisaged measurable in specific units
 - c) Benefits to the community
- iv) List of approved works with Technical estimates should be displayed on the gram panchayat in simple local language
- iv) Pre-Mid-Post Project condition of works will be recorded with photographs
- v) Each work taken up with unique number (irrespective of the implementing agency) has to be recorded in the Works register to be maintained at GP to enable verification and prevent duplication

PRI PLANNING PROCESS:

Section 13 of NREGA makes the Panchayats at district, intermediate and village levels the principal authorities for planning. The process of planning as laid down under the Act gives under Section 16 of the Act, the power to make recommendations on the works to be taken up under NREGA to the Gram Sabha and the power to prepare a development plan comprising a shelf of projects on the basis of these recommendations of the Gram Sabha to the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat has to forward the development plan with its priorities to the Programme Officer for preliminary scrutiny and approval prior to the commencement of the year in which it is proposed to be executed.

The Programme Officer has to consolidate the Gram Panchayat proposals into a block plan and after the approval of the Panchayat Samity, forward it to the District Programme Coordinator. The DPC will consolidate the Block Plans and proposals from other implementing agencies and the Zilla Parishad will approve the block wise shelf of projects.

The sequence of approvals laid down under the Act necessitates time bound coordination between different levels so that the spirit and intent of the Act is maintained specially in terms of maintaining the works priorities. It is therefore legally imperative that there are no delays in the approval of the plan of works at any level and equally necessary to ensure that the priorities of the Gram Sabha are maintained.

The absence of an approved shelf of projects affects the pace at which employment demand has to be met. Delay in finalising the plan of works will affect the finalization of the Labour Budgets by December, which in turn will affect fund release.

It is necessary to ensure timely scrutiny and approval at each level, so that an adequate number of works with administrative and technical approvals are available to meet the demand for employment. It is also necessary to ensure that each level of approval maintains the order of priority between different works that is indicated in the development projects forwarded by the Gram Panchayat under Section 16(4).

The DPC will have overall responsibility for ensuring that the process of identification of works, their consolidation, and final approval of the shelf of projects is completed by December of the year preceding the financial year in which the shelf of works are to be executed. The works so finalised will be accorded technical and administrative approval and will constitute the shelf of projects for the next financial year.

At the block level, the Programme Officer (PO) will be responsible for ensuring that the Gram Sabhas are held on 2nd October of each year for identification and recommendations of works. The priority in which the works have to be taken up must also be mentioned in the resolution of the Gram Sabha. A copy of the resolution of the Gram Sabha recommending the works to be taken up in the following financial year and their priority will be sent to the PO. The PO will also be responsible for ensuring that the Gram Panchayat approves and consolidates all Gram Sabha recommendations into the village shelf of projects and submits it to the Panchayat Samity within fifteen days of receiving all the Gram Sabha recommendations. All the Gram Panchayat development plans must reach the Programme Officer by October 15th.

Once all the Gram Panchayat Plans have been received, the PO will scrutinize the GP's Development Plan for its technical feasibility. The Programme Officer will not reject a work proposed by the Gram Panchayat. If the proposal is not within the parameters of the Act, or appears technically unfeasible, the Programme Officer will return it to the Gram Panchayat for it to replace it with a valid proposal. The PO will consolidate all GP proposals into a Block plan and submit it to the Panchayat Samity. This entire process of scrutiny, re-reference to GP, if necessary, and consolidation and submission to the Panchayat Samity will be completed by the PO by November 15th.

The Panchayat Samity will maintain the priority among different works indicated by the Gram Panchayats. It is possible that there may be a need for works that involve more than one Gram Panchayat. Only such works will be included by the Intermediate Panchayat. The Panchayat Samity will not include works that are limited in their scope to an area within the jurisdiction of one Gram Panchayat.

The Panchayat Samity will approve the Block Plan within fifteen days of the submission by the Programme Officer and the Programme Officer will submit the Block Plan to the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) by November 30th.

The District Programme Coordinator will scrutinize the Block plans, examining the appropriateness and adequacy of works in terms of likely demand as well as their technical and financial feasibility. He/she will also invite and examine work proposals from other Implementing Agencies, but in doing so, the priorities of the Gram Panchayat and the priorities of inter Gram Panchayat works as indicated in the Block Plan by the Intermediate Panchayats will be maintained.

The DPC will be responsible for consolidating the Block plans within a month of receiving all the Block Plans. The DPC will also formulate the Labour Budget on the basis of the district plan to indicate the amount of funds required to implement the Scheme in the next financial year. The DPC will submit the Block wise shelf of Projects and the Labour Budget based on it to the Zilla Parishad by 15th December. The Zilla Parishad will approve the Block wise shelf of Projects and the Labour Budget by December 31st. The District Plan will comprise a Block-wise shelf of projects. The Block-wise shelf of projects will be arranged Gram Panchayat-wise. The Implementing Agency for each work has to be identified keeping in view the mandatory minimum 50 per cent of the works to be executed by the Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayats may be given more than the minimum stipulated 50%.

The District Programme Coordinator will coordinate the preparation of detailed technical estimates and sanctions. The project report of each approved work shall contain all details as may be specified in the technical/works manual of the State Government. It will also clarify the expected outcomes such as person days of employment, specifications of the physical assets (e.g. length of road, size of a tank) and enduring outcomes (e.g. area irrigated, villages connected).

The District Programme Coordinator will communicate the sanctioned Plan to the Programme Officer. The Programme Officer will forward a copy of the Block Plan with the shelf of projects to be executed in each Gram Panchayat as well as projects that may be inter Gram Panchayat. These will carry full project cost, time frame, person-days to be generated and the name of the Implementing Agency. Planning for projects must give priority to low-wage areas, where the demand for work at minimum wages is likely to be large. This process must be completed by December of the preceding year.

The DPC will forward the Labour Budget to the State Government which will in turn, forward it with its recommendation to the Ministry of Rural Development by 31st January to enable it to release the Central share of funds for implementing the NREGS.

This entire exercise has to be undertaken and completed by 31st December of the year preceding the year for which the shelf of projects and the Labour Budget are being formulated.

If a level fails to approve the plan proposal within the time limit indicated above, it will be deemed to be approved. In case the Gram Panchayat does not approve the Gram Sabha proposals within the time limit of October 15th, the PO will have the right to satisfy himself/herself on the basis of the copy sent to the PO office of the recommendations of the Gram Sabha, that the recommendations made are in accordance with the provisions of the Act and proceed to consolidate them into the Block Plan. If the Panchayat Samity does not approve the Block Plan submitted by the PO by November 30th days it will be deemed to be approved and the Plan will be submitted by the PO to the DPC. If the Zilla Parishad does not approve the Block wise shelf of Projects and the Labour Budget by 31st December, it will be deemed to have been approved. The DPC will have to proceed to communicate the approved shelf of projects to the PO and the Gram Panchayats. The DPC will also forward the Labour Budget to the State Government for further action. The Development Plan will provide the basis of the district's annual Labour Budget.

DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE PLAN

The need to integrate work priorities with a longer-term development strategy is reflected in the Act, which states that the 'creation of durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor shall be an important objective of the Scheme'. It is suggested, therefore, that Districts develop perspective plans to enable them to assess the causal factors of poverty that are latent in and possible interventions. The District Perspective Plan (DPP) is intended to facilitate advance planning and to provide a development perspective for the District. The aim is to identify the types of NREGS works that should be encouraged in the District, and the potential linkages between these works and long-term employment generation and sustained development.

A District Perspective Plan of five years will have the advantage of facilitating the annual labour budgets as a framework of long-term planning, but it will be flexible enough to respond to the new emerging needs of the area, the experience of implementation, and the new works approved by the Central Government.

A District Perspective Plan will have the following features:

- a) Village-based: with the village as the unit for planning;
- b) Holistic: attempt to cover all aspects of natural resource management along with socio-economic infrastructure requirements so as to identify all critical aspects of development in the local area;
- c) Diagnostic: include a causal analysis of poverty. This will help identify gaps and needs, and indicate the nature of interventions required.

- d) Finalise the works that can be included under the NREGA
- e) Delineate baselines;
- f) Indicate outcome-based strategies;
- g) Indicate methods for measurement of outcomes;
- h) Identify the existing programmes and financial resources and assess the additional resources required.

The District Perspective Plan will enable the adoption of a project approach to works rather than just an activity approach.

Relationship between the Perspective Plan and the annual development plan: The Annual Development Plan will be the working plan that identifies the activities to be taken up on in a year. The Perspective Plan will provide the framework for facilitating this identification. If new activities need to be taken up, their justification should be indicated in terms of needs and outcomes.

THE WAGE-MATERIAL RATIO:

The ratio of wage costs to material costs should be no less than the minimum norm of 60:40 stipulated in the Act. This ratio should be applied preferably at the Gram Panchayat, Block and District levels. Tools and implements may be procured to enable the workers to execute the work. The cost of tools and implements may be booked under the material component of the Project. State Governments should devise a mechanism for transparent method of procurement of materials to be used under NREGA.

- To avoid duplication, a unique identity number should be given to each work.
- To ensure sustainable assets are created and a holistic approach to planning,
- A Project approach should be adopted towards defining a Work. This will enable subsuming a number of works as activities under an umbrella Work or Project. The Project may be formulated with the Block as a unit so that the Programme Officer may coordinate the activities under it at sub Block levels. Inter Block Projects may also be formulated at the District level.
- Standard designs should be put together as a document at the District level and should be made available to Panchayats and other Implementing Agencies. NIC Templates may be used.

MEASUREMENT OF WORK AND SCHEDULE OF RATES

- The Schedules of Rates (SORs) of various executing agencies for similar nature of activities and outputs in the same area must be same. Since SORs would have horizontal application across the departments/Agencies as notified by the State.

- The SOR with standard designs should be proactively disclosed and widely publicized.
- In particular, the SOR should be posted at worksites in the vernacular, in a manner that is legible and comprehensible to labourers using the simple terminology of 'people's estimates'.
- Measurement will be recorded in the Measurement Books maintained by qualified technical personnel in charge of the worksite. Relationship should exist between daily measurement of Mates and measurement by technically qualified personnel. Verification should be done by qualified personnel a week before payment of wages. Measurement should be done on a daily basis and in a transparent manner.

WORKSITE FACILITIES

- Worksite facilities are to be ensured by the Implementing Agency. Medical aid, drinking water, shade, and crèche if there are more than five children below the age of six years will have to be provided
- If more than five children below the age of six years are present at the worksite, a person (preferably a woman) should be engaged under NREGS to look after them.
- She will be paid a wage equal to the prevalent wage rate paid to the unskilled worker.
- The expenditure will be separately recorded and will not be included as part of the work measurement.
- Location of crèche should be so planned that it is optimally utilized. Normally, one crèche should be opened to one worksite or group of worksites.

ENGENDERING MGNREGS:

It includes design features to tackle some of the challenges women face in the rural economy.

- It promotes their participation in the workforce through a one-third quota in each state, provides for crèche facilities, and gives preference to women (especially single women) to work close to home.
- It states that equal wages are to be paid to men and women under the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act 1976 – an important measure given prevailing gender wage disparities. Guidelines also suggest that when the banks or *Panchayats* (local government) open bank accounts, they should consider individual and joint accounts to avoid crediting earnings solely to the male head of household.
- The Act states that women should be represented in local-level committees, and the social audit process as well as state- and central-level councils. The social audit forum, it suggests, should be

conveniently timed for MGNREGA workers, so that women and marginalised communities can attend.¹⁸

PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT (PCR)

On completion of every project, a Project Completion Report (PCR) should be prepared as per the prescribed format in the Works Register and the details entered therein should be verified by a senior officer. A photograph of the completed work should be taken as a record of the work and attached to PCR. PCR should be placed in the file pertaining to the work in the office of the Implementing Agency. This would serve as a record of verification of completion of work.

3.4 SYSTEM OF REPORTING:

3.4.1 MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION:

A web enabled MIS (www.nrega.nic.in) has been developed. This makes data transparent and available in the public domain to be equally accessed by all. The village level household data base has internal checks for ensuring consistency and conformity to normative processes. It includes separate pages for approximately 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, 6465 Blocks, 619 Districts and 34 States & UTs. The portal places complete transaction level data in public domain for example - Job cards, Demand for work and Muster rolls which is attendance cum payment sheet for worker. All critical parameters get monitored in public domain:

- Workers' entitlement data and documents such as Registration, job cards, muster rolls
- Work selection and execution data including, shelf of approved and sanctioned works, work estimates, works under execution, measurement
- Employment demanded and provided
- Financial indicators such as funds available, funds used, and the disaggregated structure of fund utilizations to assess the amount paid as wages, materials and administrative expenses

3.4.2 ACTION ON AUDIT REPORTS

¹⁸<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/5124.pdf>

A Physical Audit of the works undertaken will be conducted to verify the quality of works and to check that the expenditures incurred have led to the creation of durable assets.

A copy of every Audit Report, whether conducted by the Chartered Accountant, the Local Fund Auditor or the Internal Audit Cell and auditors of the Accountant General or Comptroller and Auditor General, and Social Audit Reports is received by the State Government.

The State Government may ensure speedy action against the concerned officials/ non-officials for misappropriation of funds, frauds, incorrect measurement, false entries in the muster rolls and other irregularities of a serious nature, resulting in the leakage of Government/public funds/resources and the denial of entitlements to workers. The State Government will also take appropriate steps to prevent such irregularities.

3.4.3CITIZENS' CHARTER

A model 'Citizens' Charter' should be developed covering all aspects of the duties of Panchayats and officials under the Act. The Citizens' Charter should describe the specific steps involved in implementing the provisions of the Act, and lay down the minimum service levels mandated by these provisions on the Panchayats and the officers concerned.

3.4.5GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

The Programme Officer will be the Grievance Redressal Officer at the Block level, and the District Programme Coordinator at the District level. All grievances will be disposed of within the time limit prescribed in the Act.

3.4.5SOCIAL AUDIT

A social audit is a process in which the people work with the government to monitor and evaluate the planning and implementation of a scheme or programme, or indeed of a policy or law. The social audit process is critically dependent on the demystification and wide dissemination of all relevant information.

In order to develop a social audit protocol for the NREGA, it is necessary to identify the distinct stages (or sets of entitlements) involved. These are:

- A. Registration and receipt of job cards.
- B. Applying for work, getting work in time or receiving unemployment allowance.

- C. Participating in the identification of projects and sites, approval of technical estimates and issuing of work order.
- D. Participation in the supervision and measurement/evaluation of work.
- E. Disbursement of full wages, on time.

PROACTIVE DISCLOSURE UNDER RTI ACT 2005:

The first stage of the Right to Information is the Proactive disclosure of Information, where the government has a duty to inform people. Proactive disclosure implies the primary responsibility of the government agencies to disclose the details to the people without their formal application. It is proactive effort and concern towards accountability norms and principles. MNREGA gives special focus on this clause. The Act says that section 4 which concerns proactive disclosure of information, should be strictly complied with at all levels. The guidelines specify: *Key documents related to MNREGA should be proactively disclosed to the public, without waiting for anyone to 'apply' for them.*

Accordingly, the MNREGA guidelines mandate that all levels of government maintain proper records containing information on inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes related to the MNREGA is displayed to the public through display boards and paintings on the walls of the Panchayat offices and also putting information up on website. Its implementation at every level would convert both the MNREGA and its delivery agencies into an open information network.

3.5 PROGRESS OF MGNREGA IN WEST BENGAL

The most important outcome of the MGNREGA is the numbers of days the households receive employment on demand during the year 2009-10. During the year total 1551.71 lakh person days were generated by 34.75 lakh households under the programme. The position of the state in the country in those respects is seventh as shown in Table – 2.

Table 2 Inter State Physical & Financial Performance under NREGA during 2009-10 (As on 20.4.2010)

Sl. No.	States	No. of HH provided employment (in lakh)	Rank	Person days generated (In Lakhs)	Ranking	Average person days per HH	Rank	Total Expenditure (Rs. In Crores)	Rank
1	<u>AP</u>	58.30	2	3259.5	3	56	5	3482.91	4
2	Assam	21.33	9	728.54	11	34	18	1029.71	11
3	<u>Bihar</u>	41.27	5	1137.51	8	28	21	1816.88	7

4	Gujarat	16.01	12	582.53	12	36	16	714.35	12
5	Haryana	1.56	21	59.03	21	38	14	143.58	21
6	Karnataka	31.45	8	1722.27	6	55	7	2336.81	5
7	Kerala	8.54	14	263.61	17	31	19	387.20	15
8	M.P	47.48	4	2650.05	4	56	6	3898.31	3
9	Maharashtra	5.84	15	269.97	16	46	12	312.75	17
10	Punjab	2.70	20	76.4	20	28	20	148.67	20
11	Rajasthan	63.56	1	4428.63	1	70	2	5635.36	2
12	Tamilnadu	40.91	6	2219.54	5	54	8	1593.42	8
13	Tripura	5.70	16	390.08	14	68	3	587.07	14
14	U.P	54.80	3	3562.01	2	65	4	5902.24	1
15	West Bengal	34.75	7	1551.71	7	45	13	2110.40	6
16	Chhattisgarh	20.25	10	1041.56	9	51	9	1303.67	10
17	Jharkhand	17.02	11	842.47	10	49	10	1379.70	9
18	Uttarkhand	5.22	17	182.39	18	35	17	283.09	18
19	Manipur	3.90	18	280.92	15	72	1	379.96	16
20	Meghalaya	3.00	19	147.99	19	49	11	183.46	19
21	Orissa	11.87	13	439.67	13	37	15	693.74	13

In West Bengal the districts providing employment for more than 45 days are Jalpaiguri, Purulia, Birbhum, Burdwan, North 24 Parganas, Dakshin Dinajpur, Paschim Medinipur and Nadia. Highest numbers of days of employment of 64 days on an average was provided in Jalpaiguri and Purulia district, which is higher than the national average of 51 (Table 2). Only 15 days employment on an average was provided in the district of Howrah, although it has increased from only 9 days of employment provided in the previous year. Less than 30 days employment per household on an average was provided in the districts of Hooghly,

Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas, DGHC, Siliguri MP and Howrah. The district-wise comparison is displayed in Table 3.¹⁹

Table 3 District-wise Comparison Of Achievement of 2008-09 & 2009-10

Name of the District	Employment provided per HH		
	March '09	March'10	% of Increase/ Decrease
Jalpaiguri	25	64	152.44
U Dinajpur	24	36	48.49
D Dinajpur	25	53	114.48
Malda	17	40	137.71
MSD	21	29	40.83
S 24 Pgs	19	29	53.56
W Midnapur	27	52	91.82
Bankura	28	44	55.00
Purulia	31	64	107.68
Birbhum	38	56	48.21
C Behar	15	32	107.37
DGHC	26	24	-8.20
Siliguri MP	20	19	-5.63
Nadia	30	47	54.73
N 24 Pgs	42	54	27.12
Hooghly	20	30	51.19

¹⁹The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (NREGA):Some Reports from the Field,2007, Ministry of Rural Development, Department of Rural Development, Government of India, New Delhi

E Midnapur	16	39	142.59
Burdwan	34	55	62.70
Howrah	9	15	72.54
State Avg.	26	45	71.59

A JOURNEY TOWARDS LIGHT

Villages around the Ajodhya hills under Bagmundi block of Purulia district belong to one of the poorest regions of the State. The hill dwellers, mostly from the 'Santal' community generally depend on forest to earn their livelihood. There are some monocropped agricultural lands on which maize, paddy & tomato is grown on rented condition.

The tribal women of the area have come forward in large numbers to form Self Help Groups. The SHG movement got momentum in the year 2005 at Ajodhya hilltop under Ajodhya Gram Panchayat. Now 65 numbers of SHGs have been formed out of which 30 numbers have completed 1st grading. The journey of one of the SHGs, namely "Shimulbera Adibasi Mahila Samity" started in the fag end of the year 2005 under the leadership of Smt. Mahati Tudu along with other nine tribal women of that village. The SHG started savings of Rs.30/- per head per month, now savings accumulated to Rs.21, 000/- (SB A/C No. 8249. UBI, Bagmundi). The group already has got assistance (as Revolving Fund of Rs. 20,000/- in two phases) from DRDC. Bank has also provided loan through Cash-Credit A/C. The members have begun to take small amount of loan as per necessity and started Goat & Pig rearing. Thus they begin their fight against poverty towards an endless success. Now their families are ensured of their food security and other essential expenditure.

The miracle happened with the introduction of NREGA Programme. A water body, namely 'Shimulbera Kamarjora Bandh' is being excavated under the said programme and the payment of wages to the labourer was made through this SHG. The BDO, Bagmundi engaged another SHG and other villagers of Shimulbera (around 40 people) to make payment of wages as paymaster. Smt. Mahati Tudu and the other members of her SHG maintain the accounts with the help of Block Officials/Staff, as they are only able to sign their names as neo-literates. The group members has taken decision to start composite farming e.g. fishery, duckary, goatary & piggery in and around the tank. They have already started pisciculture. DRDC, Purulia came forward to assist the group through infrastructure development with sanction of Rs.1, 00,000/- for the SHG and first installment of Rs. 25,000/- has been released in their SB A/c. This infrastructure will also benefit another SHG, namely Netaji Mahila SHG of the said village. Both the groups i.e. Shimulbera Adibasi Mahila Samity & Netaji Mahila SHG are started the construction of infrastructure jointly.

At present their dream is becoming a reality. Almost all the group members can sign and now they are more empowered – they visit GP Office, Block Office & Bank and have started asserting their right and grievance to the appropriate authorities. They have started their journey from zero have to go a long way. They need assistance from all corners.

3.6 ASSIGNMENT UNDER MGNREGS:

The assignment should cover the following;

3.6.1 Get familiar with the NREG Act and scheme guidelines issued by the P&RD Department. Go through the report of the State level monitor, if available with the DNO's office, to get an insight on the lapses in implementation and good practices followed etc.

3.6.2 Select a Village Panchayat and critically examine implementation of the programme with special focus on the following issues:-

1. Estimate the total number of agricultural workers in the GP area, total net & gross cropped area and estimate the total mandays of work the landowners had to hire for agricultural operation based on reported cropping pattern. Derive the average mandays of work received by agricultural labourers and average income of one labourer per year (the estimate need to be very precise a realistic guess in consultation with local people, agricultural workers such as the KPS will be adequate for the assignment, there may be practice of contractual payment instead of daily wage payment for sowing/harvesting etc; which may be converted in to equivalent wage per day). Also collect the variation of wage month-wise and average number of days of work an agricultural labourer have received on an average to get a very rough idea of month-wise break up of income from agriculture of a labourer. Work out the month-wise payment of total wage by the GP and compare the month-wise total earning per labourer from private work as well as from MGNREGS on an average. Ideally, work provided by MGNREGS should be higher when the scope of getting work from the market is the lowest. Check total supplementation of annual income per labourer on an average out of MGNREGS and how does that match with month-wise variation of demand for employment. Examine if more work could be provided during lean agricultural season.
2. Meet few families who have got much less than the average number of days of wage provided in that GP and check whether they were aware of their rights and if they had demanded work. Analyse and report what prevented them from getting hundred days work (possible reasons - no need for work or apathy of the GP in providing work and overt/covert denial of their rights or failure of the administrative machinery in handling the demand or natural difficulty in providing wage employment in that area or too many people wanted work and enough work could not be started due to non-availability of fund or a combination of more than one factors). In case few families

have got 100 or close to hundred days work then how they got it and to what extent they differed with those who did not get it. Observe the system of demand for work and allocation of work to different families. Is it really demand driven or it is just supply driven and people are asked to join work as per wish of the GP/others. In that case what are the constraints for making the work demand driven?

3. How the labour budget was prepared? Were the labourers/GUS consulted in knowing the seasonal demand for work and in identification of work to meet the demand? Is the GP prepared to take up a new scheme as soon as demand grows and the scheme with vetted estimate is kept ready in advance or the GP moves for vetting the estimate after fund is received for the work? Does the Block office has prior knowledge of details of the proposed works and vetted estimates based on actual pre-work measurement before giving approval to start the work or the same is based on notional estimate made during preparation of the annual plan. Is specific approval of works is given or merely the list of works is approved and the GP is at liberty to start any work and continue with any number of works simultaneously?
4. Study the system of requisition of fund to start a new scheme by the GP. How long it takes for receiving fund after the demand reaches the Block office. What is the delay between GP deciding to start a work and actual starting of the work? Is the work taken up without approval and without receiving fund?
5. What is the system of management of labourers at the work site and taking attendance; available work site facilities and disclosure of information about the work for public information?
6. Study the system of preparation and verification of muster rolls, taking measurement, checking the measurement books/sheets, deciding on payment and release of individual payment to bank & post offices and transfer of fund from NREGS accounts to bank/post offices and delays involved. What is the system of checking quality of assets created?
7. System of social audit within the GP, participation of the people, lapses observed and corrective measures taken.
8. Analyse all the works taken up for execution during last 12 months/or a certain period of the year if adequate data is not available and check how long it took to complete the works (average period taken to complete the work & maximum period taken), reason for taking long time in completion of

works, system of submitting work completion reports and how many works remained under implementation at a time. Also, analyse the works in terms of category of works for community benefit. Assess the percentage distribution of different types of works like water conservation, irrigation, social forestry, road connectivity etc. Get the Core Network of roads for the Block identified under the PMGSY and if the GP has got any GIS map and whether any road has been constructed or upgraded for improvement as per the Core Network. Identify the works with maximum impact on creation of employment potential for generation of employment without government intervention and augmenting economic activity of the area on a sustainable basis.

9. Inspect some of the community assets created and check the quality of works. Check if there were cases of dovetailing of MGNREGS scheme with other scheme/fund for creation of durable assets.
10. Find the type of works taken up for individual benefit, system of selection of beneficiaries. Study few cases of individual benefitting scheme and assess the economic benefit of the scheme which will flow to the family on a sustainable basis.
11. Work out the average employment provided per family in a year and share of employment of the women. Try to identify works in which it is easier for the women to participate and find if the GP has tried to augment employment generation by the women
12. Find out the works like social forestry which may be taken up during lean agricultural season and check if there has been a conscious effort in taking up more such works and what is the constraint?
13. Find if, and in that case how, SHGs are associated with implementation of the MGNREGS and if there is any convergence between that scheme and the SGSY/SHG movement.
14. Study the MIS of the MGNREGS and how data is uploaded in the website. Check some of the data uploaded in the website with GP record and ground reality by actual field verification. How many registers are maintained at the GP office for implementation of the scheme and what is the status of maintenance of those records?
15. What is the system of procurement of material to be used under MGNREGS? Report on the actual system followed in the GP. Is material procured assessing requirement of several schemes at a time before implementation of any particular scheme or the same is procured for individual scheme. Check the system of transparency and publicity of the procurement process.

16. Study the functioning of the Block Programme Management Unit and the strength and weakness of functioning of the unit. Is there any dedicated working space for the Unit and does every one exclusively earmarked for the scheme sit there? Also study the system of inspection of works through visits from Block office and system of monitoring, including monthly review, and interventions from Block level for improving performance of GPs which are lagging behind in implementation of the programme. Check the maintenance of registers and records at the Block Office.
17. Study the functioning of the DNO's office and the system of releasing fund, addressing grievances, enquiry of complaints and actions taken against lapses and overall monitoring & supervision on the performances of the Block Programme Unit.

Conclusion: The Human Development Report 2010 based on the drawing on Jean Drèze and Reetika Khera (2010) has made the following observation: "In fiscal year 2009/2010 India spent almost \$10 billion (approximately 1 percent of GDP) on the programme, and 53 million households participated. On average, each participating household worked for 54 days. Disadvantaged groups joined in large numbers; a majority of workers were members of Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, and more than half were women. The payment of minimum wages and improved work conditions at NREGA worksites has created pressure for similar improvements in the private labour market, benefiting all rural workers. Distress migration to urban areas has slowed. And for many rural women programme earnings are an important source of economic independence. Awareness is higher than for most pieces of legislation. "NREGA" has become a household word, and even school children can answer questions about workers' rights. But it takes time to understand the notion of "work on demand" as a legal entitlement, awareness that is crucial for NREGA to become a step towards the right to work or even an effective social security measure.²⁰"

²⁰ Human Development Report 2010 ,20th Anniversary Edition pg no 106 published by the United Nations Development Programme, 1 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA