

A Critical Appraisal of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005

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Abstract: *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act or MGNREGA is an Indian job guarantee scheme, enacted by legislation on August 25, 2005. The scheme provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage.*

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 was a part of the commitments made by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government of its Common Minimum Programme and came into effect in February 2006 primarily in 200 districts. It was a commendable effort and has attracted national and international attention. It has manifold objectives. On the one hand it is a social protection measure and implemented on the experience of previous public schemes, especially the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in Maharashtra. On the other hand, through providing guarantee employment in rural areas, it also seeks to improve labour market outcomes. This Act has dual purpose, it creates employment as well as sustainable assets in rural areas.

This act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living in rural India. MGNREGA is designed as a safety net to reduce migration by rural poor households in the lean period through. It is an important step towards realisation of the right to work. It is expected to enhance people's livelihood security on a sustained basis, by developing economic and social infrastructure in rural areas.

India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which began in 2006 is the largest public workfare scheme in the world. In the 2010-11 fiscal year, the MGNREGS employed 55 million households who put in 2.5 billion work days on 5.1 million projects, financed by a budget of Rs. 394 billion. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 that created the MGNREGS grants each rural household a legal right to employment of up to 100 days per year in public works projects at a minimum wage rate fixed by the concerned state. 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 labour force.

MGNREGA is the flagship programme of the UPA Government that directly touches lives of the poor and promotes inclusive growth. The Act aims at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas of the country. MGNREGA is the first ever law internationally, that guarantees wage employment at an unprecedented scale.

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has a five-tier structure of implementation starting from Gram Panchayat at the bottom to the Central Government at the top. Gram Panchayat is the nodal agency at the bottom level that has the authority to select, design and implement the works. Selection of works, execution, monitoring and supervision are done by the Gram Sabha (Village Council). Gram Panchayat has the responsibility to register households, issue job cards, receive applications for employment, provide employment and monitor the works under this scheme.

Keywords: MGNREGA, Job Guarantee, Panchayat Raj, Rural development, Wage & Employment.