VI

Summary and concluding observations

6.1. Summary:

Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization (LPG), which have been initiated in a number of countries in the world have stressed more on market driven approach of development. The market driven approach of development has failed to maintain ‘human face’ in course of development. The new approach has in fact resulted in exclusion of large section of the population from realizing the fruits of development. This has called for stronger role of the state to ensure public employment programme as a part of social security policies in many countries in the world. India is no exception in this regard.

During last two decades India’s economy has been placed on the higher growth trajectory. At the same time performance of India in some critical areas like alleviation of poverty and unemployment in general and rural unemployment and rural poverty in particular is not satisfactory at all. To overcome the situation there has been many wage employment programmes as a part of inclusive growth strategy of the Government of India. Among those programmes most important one is the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005. The Act contains a scheme namely the MGNREGS, which is intended to provide 100 days work in a financial year to every rural household, who volunteer to do casual manual work. The said Act also contains a provision of mandatory biannual social audit, which aims to ensure transparent implementation of the scheme by means of continuous public vigilance. Thus in our present study we have tried to find out the effect of active participation of the beneficiaries of the scheme in the social audit meetings on the enhancement of their awareness levels of the different aspects of the same. Here we will present summary of our findings, which is given as under:

i) We have concentrated our study in the State of West Bengal on the ground that the economy of West Bengal is basically an agrarian economy. Despite successful implementation of Panchayati Raj institutions and land reforms, West Bengal suffers from the acute problem of rural unemployment and poverty due to very high density of population for historical reasons coupled with absence of alternative source of rural non-farm employment. Moreover agricultural sector of the state has also been under stress due to different institutional and technical reasons particularly, during the last decade. So, the
MGNREGS, which have lot of potentials to transform rural livelihood is highly significant because of its possible role in mitigating the problem of rural unemployment and poverty.

ii) The MGNREGS is the most important flagship programme in India among various rural development programs. This has been implemented throughout the country in a phased manner. At present West Bengal has 19 MGNREGA districts excluding newly created district Alipurduar. Till the end of the financial year 2014-15 as many as 48 lakh rural households have been benefited from the scheme and as many as 124 core person days have been created by the scheme in the state. But as per the administrative report of the Government of India the performance of state in creating additional person-days per household, which is the main indicator of performance of the MGNERGS, is not satisfactory in comparison with the national average.

iii) The significance of the scheme in the context of rural poverty necessitated effective implementation of the most radical provision of the MGNREGA relating to mandatory biannual social audit in the interest of capacity building of the rural masses and to ensure optimum utilization of the benefit of the scheme. The official data of the Government of India shows that during last six financial years from 2009-10 to 2014-15 on an average 93% of the Gram Panchayats (GPs) have conducted social audit under their MGNREG schemes, which indicates that still now social audit of the scheme is yet to be implemented in all the GPs in the state. At the same time it has also been found that despite some procedural loopholes, the performance of GPs of West Bengal in terms of organization of the social audit is better than GPs in other states.

iv) In this study we have tried to investigate the effectiveness of social audit mechanism of the MGNREGS in increasing the Awareness Level of the job card holders of West Bengal and also to find out the effects of such Awareness Level on the physical performance of the scheme in the state. Our study is based on both primary and secondary data. We have conducted our primary survey in three selected districts of West Bengal, namely, Malda, Nadia and Hooghly. We have interviewed 300 job card holders in 12 selected Gram Panchayats under 6 selected Community Development Blocks in the aforesaid districts. We present the summary of findings of the primary survey below:
a) Mean participation at the social audit meeting at *Gram Sabha* of the respondent job card holders: From our analysis we found that at the intra-district level in case of Malda and Hooghly districts the mean participation at the social audit meeting at *Gram Sabha* of the respondent job card holders of worst GPs are significantly better than that in best GPs. In case of Nadia district there is no significant difference between best and worst GPs in this respect. At the inter district level it has been found that Hooghly districts stands at best position among our three selected districts in terms of mean participation at the social audit meeting, followed by Malda and Nadia. There is no significant difference between Malda and Nadia and between Malda and Hooghly in terms of mean participation. However, there is significant difference between Nadia and Hooghly in this respect.

b) Mean awareness level of the respondent job card holders: Our analysis shows that at intra-district level the mean awareness level of the respondent job card holders of worst GPs of Malda and Hooghly are significantly higher than that in best GPs. The situation is unique in case of Nadia due to the fact that in that district there is no significant difference in mean awareness level among job card holders of best and worst GPs. At the inter district level Nadia district occupies highest position among three selected districts in terms of mean awareness level and followed by Malda and Hooghly. There is no significant difference in two districts Malda and Hooghly in this respect. At the intra-state level it has been found that there is no significant difference in terms of mean awareness level of the respondent job card holders in best and worst GPs of West Bengal. At the state level the mean awareness level is yet to reach 50% mark and the same is also lower than the level achieved by the state of Andhra Pradesh, but greater than adjacent states Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand, data of which are now available.

c) Association between Participation at the Social Audit Meeting and the Awareness Level of the respondent job card holders: On the basis of our analysis we found that except two worst GPs of Malda and Hooghly at all levels two variables viz. participation of respondents at social audit at *Gram Sabha* of the job card holders and their awareness level, which are most important indicators of the adherence of social audit are positively correlated and those correlations have also been found to be statistically significant. In case of Nadia the situation is unique in the sense that in case of best as well as worst GPs
the correlation is significantly positive and the degree of association is greater in case of worst GPs than that in best GPs. It is also to be noted that in worst GPs of Malda the association is negative and that in worst GPs of Hooghly it is positive. In both the above two cases the association has been found to be statistically insignificant.

At the inter district level the degree of association has been found to be positive and statistically significant in all three districts. The same is highest in Nadia and lowest in Malda and Hooghly stands in between. At the intra-state level, both in best and worst GPs the degree of association is positive and statistically significant. Again in case of best GPs the degree of association is higher than that in worst GPs. At the state level the association is also positive and significant.

d) **Variation in result:** Our statistical analysis shows that there are wide variations in result at all the levels of our study. This is due to the fact that awareness level of the job-card holders on different aspects of the MGNREGS is the result of their active participation at social audit meetings at *Gram Sabha* on the ground of significant positive association between participation at the social audit meeting at *Gram Sabha* of the job card holders and their awareness level in most of the GPs of West Bengal. At the same time, it is also found that awareness level of the job card holders may be influenced by the socio-economic factors viz. education level, social backwardness, gender profile, occupation profile, economic status and geographical location due to possible influence of those factors either individually or jointly on the job card holders to actively participate at the social audit meetings. In West Bengal, our findings reveal that some of those factors may have higher influencing power on the awareness level of the job card holders. Thus though we have mainly analyzed the effect of Participation at the Social Audit Meeting at *Gram Sabha* of the respondent job-card holders on their Awareness Level, influences of other socio-economic factors have played important role in some cases to cause variations in result in different levels of our study.

e) **Effect of awareness level on the physical performance of the MGNREGS:** In the pre-survey period it has been found that the association between the mean awareness level of the job-card holders and the person-days per household per year in the selected GPs is not statistically significant. But the same has been found to be statistically significant at the post-survey period. Moreover the person-days per household in post-survey period are
greater than that in the pre-survey period. That seems to indicate the existence of a positive relationship between the active participation at social audit meeting at Gram Sabha and the awareness level of the job card holders. As a result of their active participation at the social audit meetings the job-card holders in the selected GPs were able to be aware of their entitlements from the scheme. Such awareness has enabled them to influence the performance of the scheme in terms of generation of person days in the post survey period.

6.2. Concluding observations:
The MGNREGA is one of the landmark legislations in the field of rural development in India. As the largest flagship programme of the Government of India it provides a major macro-economic weapon to ensure socio-economic transformation of rural India by means of alleviating rural unemployment problem and poverty and also reducing out migration of rural masses for maintaining their livelihood. But India is such a country, where corruption has pervaded the entire fabric of its society. The rampant corruption affects most of the welfare schemes in India. To root it out inclusion of mandatory biannual social audit as one of the important provisions of the MGNREGA is highly significant.

So far as our study is concerned we have found that in the context of the rural development of West Bengal, which suffers from acute problem of rural unemployment and poverty, the MGNREGS is the most important wage employment programme to ensure additional wage employment for rural masses of the state. Since its inception it has created lot of additional person days in the state towards this end. However as compared to the national average the performance of the state in this respect is not encouraging at all. At the same time it is also fact that despite the discouraging position of the state in terms of physical performance of the scheme, officially the performance of its GPs in conducting social audit is quite satisfactory. Our study further confirms that the social audit meetings at the Gram Sabha arranged by the GPs in West Bengal for the MGNREGS have in most of the cases particularly in best GPs have positive and significant effect on the awareness level of the job-card holders.

It has also been found that though in the pre-survey period there is no significant effect of the awareness level of the job card holders on the physical performance of the scheme, but in the post-survey period former has the significant positive effect on the latter. Thus, we may conclude that Awareness Level of the job-card holders, which they may acquire by means of their
active Participation at the Social Audit Meeting at *Gram Sabha*, has positive and lasting effect on the physical performance of the scheme.

Despite the importance and significance of the social audit in the state our primary survey results revealed wide variations of the effectiveness of social audit at all levels of analysis i.e. at intra-district, inter district and intra-state level. The reason for such variation might be found in the existence of statistically significant influence of some socio-economic factors viz. geographical location, education profile, gender and caste profile, occupation profile and economic profile of the job-card holders to actively participate at the social audit meeting at *Gram Sabha* so as to acquire awareness about the different aspects the scheme.

So, we may infer that organization of social audit is the necessary condition for achievement of awareness level of the job-card holders to ensure physical performance of the scheme. But it is also the fact that only participation at the social audit meeting may not ensure the active participation of the job-card holders at the social audit as well as their awareness level. Their geographical location, level of education, occupation, gender and caste profile, economic profile may contribute lots towards this end.

Despite all these, there are some areas in respect of social audit of the MGNREGS, which deserves further and more elaborate studies in future for the interest of finding the ways to streamline the potentials of the social audit towards more advanced physical performance of the scheme, which according to our opinion are:

i) In the present study we have taken ‘participation at the social audit meeting at *Gram Sabha*’ as an important indicator of awareness level of the job-card holders under MGNREGS. However, there are other indicators also. Analysis of our data of field survey reveals that some socio-economic factors also exert significant influence on the awareness levels of the respondent job-card holders. Factors like urban effect, gender, caste, educational and economic status, occupation of the job card holders may significantly influence their active Participation at the Social Audit Meeting to achieve higher Awareness Level. So, the influences of those important socio-economic factors deserve more elaborate probing to understand the effect of all the possible factors, which may have influence on the job-card holders to actively
participate at the social audit meeting and as a result to achieve more awareness to enforce their rights as enshrined in the MGNREGA.

ii) It has been found in course of our primary survey that in one GP (Sadhanpara-I) under Krishnanagar-II CD Block in the district of Nadia that none of the selected job-card holders and even Gram Panchyat representatives acknowledged that they did not have any idea about the social audit meeting at Gram Sabha as on the date. So, we found zero participation of the selected job-card holders at the social audit meeting in the concerned Gram Panchayat. But in the present study we could not find the possible reasons for such ignorance and whether the same situation existed in any other GPs of West Bengal. This deficiency calls for further studies on the issue of level of awareness of the job card holders as well as panchayat representatives in West Bengal about the social audit meeting.

iii) In three GPs, one (Noapara-I) under Krishnanagar-II CD block in the district Nadia, one (Bulbulchandi) under Habibpur CD block and one (Binodpur) under Englishbazar CD block in the district Malda, it has been found that total number job-card holders are greater than total number of households of the concerned GPs. That deviation indicates possibilities of lack of transparency in the matter of issue of job-cards in some GPs in West Bengal. But in the present study we could not try to find the reasons for the same. That deficiency calls for further studies on the issue of effectiveness of the transparency safeguards, which are being presently followed in West Bengal in the matter of issue of job cards to the rural households.