CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA) guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act has come into force with effect from February, 2006 in 200 districts initially and later on extended to all the rural districts of India from the financial year 2008-09. The Act is an important step towards realization of the right to work. It is also expected to enhance people’s livelihood on a sustained basis, by developing the economic and social infrastructure in rural areas. The choice of works seeks to address the causes of chronic poverty such as drought, deforestation and soil erosion.

Effectively implemented, the employment guaranteed under the Act has the potential of transforming the geography of poverty. NREGA is the most significant act in the history of Indian polity in many ways like grass-root level participation of every citizen and beneficiary through democratic process, multi-layered social audit and transparency mechanism by involvement of civil society, comprehensive planning at village level towards sustainable and equitable development etc. Important salient feature of the Act is to improve the quality of life of rural households who are vulnerable to out-migration in search of daily wage employment by channelising the wage workforce towards developmental activities at the village level itself.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, besides, the main features mentioned in the above, also involves participatory planning and implementation of the scheme through (i) proactive role of Gram Sabha, (ii) rigorous & continuous monitoring by way of social audit, and (iii) involvement of ordinary people at the grass-roots level. It addresses (i) chronic poverty, (ii) drought, (iii)
deforestation, (iv) soil erosion etc. It also aims at (i) generating productive assets, (ii) protecting the environment, (iii) empowering rural women, (iv) arresting rural-urban migration.

The scheme is implemented through collaborative partnership right from Grama Sabha to Central Government Community participation by way of (i) Grama Sabha, (ii) local vigilance & monitoring committees, and (iii) Self Help Groups (SHGs), and ensures active role by Civil Society Organisations. At official level, the scheme was embedded with inbuilt monitoring & evaluation mechanism at every layer of implementation including online monitoring through Monitoring and Information System (MIS).

The scheme is implicitly strengthened by mandatory and active participation of local community, and complete transparency in all operations and record keeping. Nevertheless, due to massive funding, extensive coverage of beneficiaries, there is a necessity to identify and assess the ground realities, channelizing labour-intensive activities into sustainable assets at village level.

This study was conducted with the objectives to identify the feat of MGNREGS, to ascertain the reach of MGNREGS, to delve into the extent of transparency and accountability of MGNREGA, to find out the impact of the scheme on the social life of the entire rural population of Thiruvananthapuram District, to assess the impact of the scheme on the rate of rural urban migration in the selected area and to assess the benefits gained by the women community in the area.

Findings.

This study has found out that MGNREGA has reached the most backward areas of the study region and the benefits of this scheme are being reaped by the men and women of the most backward areas of the study areas. The respondents are of the
opinion that the scheme is being implemented as per the norms enlisted in the act. All the respondents have job cards, bank accounts and muster rolls are maintained in all the work sites. Majority of the respondents seems to be satisfied with the implementation of the scheme and transparency and accountability of MGNREGA. Major problems cited by the respondents were with regard to delayed payment of wages. 90 per cent of the respondents agreed to the fact that majority of the workers had active role in planning of work that has to be taken up and implemented. In the study area there had been cases of labour stir that has occurred due to the workers demanding for higher wages. This was not an isolated labour stir, on enquire it was found that similar type of labour stirs were conducted by MGNREGA workers in other parts of the state also. Majority of the workers are organised under the self help groups and they are very much aware of the benefits of MGNREGA. 418 respondents are people who have come out of home for work for the first time. Majority of the beneficiaries were literate and only 3.4 per cent of the respondents were illiterate. 97.2 per cent of the study group had other sources of income and just a meagre 2.8 per cent rely solely on their income from MGNREGA to survive. 90.8 per cent of the sample studied is not in a position to save even a fraction of their income from MGNREGA. 46 people are able to save a part of their income from MGNREGA. The majority of the beneficiaries are not able to save money in the form of assets or as cash they are able to give better education to their children with the extra income that they earn through MGNREGA.

One of the major goals of MGNREGA is 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. Perumkadavila is the most backward region of
Thiruvananthapuram district and the road facilities are very poor. In the financial year 2010-11 of the total 1095 projects completed, 359 projects were undertaken to improve rural connectivity. In 2011-12 also, the situation was no different. Of the 2064 assets created, 635 works were taken up for improving rural connectivity. The benefits gained due to the MGNREGA for Perumkadavila block in respect of rural connectivity is remarkable.

Women have drawn more wages than men in Pothencode block. The data reveals that just 3 per cent of the wages drawn were by men and 97 per cent are by women. For the financial year 2011-2012 Rs 4608364 was disbursed to 2800 women for their involvement in MGNREGA. In Perumkadavila block just 8.62 per cent of the wages drawn were by men and 91.38 per cent are by women. For the financial year 2011-2012 Rs 173631200 was disbursed to 52734 women for their involvement in MGNREGA.

The facts and figures pertaining to assets created through MGNREGA is very impressive and a lay man interpreting the data would feel that MGNREGA has changed the entire appearance of the rural parts of Thiruvananthapuram district. But the reality is not that impressive. The benefits are welcoming and very useful to the society. For example, Paruthipara to school, road side drain to prevent water logging, Community hall to kuttamala school, road construction, Kattalapara to cherayikodu walk way renovation, Mungodu to Nellipara, walkway renovation, Aranmula-Vayangille road construction, Kaipanplavila- kottupara road construction, earthen road, Vavoodu- poocharakonam road construction, earthen road, Pandha- kuringima, road construction, earthen road, Pandiyampara to parukunnam bridge, road construction, earthen road are some of the projects that has been undertaken under the heading, rural connectivity in Perumkadavila block and these projects have benefited
the society a lot. These are not the only projects that have spread effect, there are many more, the list is exhaustive. But there are projects like cleaning of cheriyakodu community hall and road towards community hall, is a listed work under rural connectivity. This project has no role in improving the rural connectivity. A few of other examples of similar kind of unproductive work are, Kangiramvila-mandapathinkadavu bund road cleaning, Chundakanimudu to aruvipuram road cleaning etc. Another point worth mentioning here is that these projects cannot be said as useless or unimportant because they have definitely improved the welfare of people as well as has provided wages for the workers. Some of the projects might not have any economic benefits but the welfare gained to the society by taking up the project could have been very high. In the context of assets generated under rural connectivity we can say that these projects could have been avoided or at least taken up under different headings.

Financial inclusion has worked really well with MGNREGA. This is very evident from the data collected during the study. As MGNREGA spreads, financial exclusion will decline. Once each and every rural Indian becomes part of MGNREGA, we can say that India is a financially inclusive country.

This study has made a strenuous effort to find out the magnitude of self empowerment that has happened to the women beneficiaries of MGNREGA in the study area. Of the 500 selected beneficiaries 452 respondents were women. Seven statements were asked to them and their self assessment was recorded for further analysis. 98.4 per cent of the women in the sample population had agreed to the fact that their recognition in the society has improved a lot after joining MGNREGA. 86.00 per cent of the women respondents were of the strong view that through MGNREGA their economic position has improved over the past few years. 14.00 per
cent of the women respondents also agreed to the fact that MGNREGA has improved to their economic position. Over the past few years the economic position of the women in the study area has considerably increased due to their involvement in MGNREGA. 74.50 per cent of the women respondents strongly opined that through MGNREGA they were able to acquire more skills and knowledge. 14.50 per cent agreed to the fact that they were able to develop some skills and knowledge was as 11.00 per cent of the respondents were uncertain about their improvements with regard to skills and knowledge. Through MGNREGA the respondents were exposed to new areas of work which they would not have done if they were not part of this scheme. 48.00 per cent of the women in the sample selected strongly opined that after joining MGNREGA they are in better position to take decisions for the family problems. 8.00 per cent agreed to the statement and 39.00 per cent were uncertain about the change happened to them. 5.00 per cent of the women respondents disagreed and felt that MGNREGA has not brought about any change in their decision making capacity. 89.00 per cent of the women respondents were of the strong opinion that after joining MGNREGA their confidence level has increased considerably. 10.50 per cent agreed to the fact that their confidence level has increased after joining MGNREGA and 0.50 per cent were uncertain about the fact that whether their confidence level has increased or not. 12.00 per cent of the selected respondents strongly felt that they have motivated others to take up MGNREGA. 17.00 per cent agreed that they have motivated others to take up MGNREGA. 71.00 per cent of the respondents were uncertain about their opinion.

Suggestions

The effectiveness of MGNREGA can be of multiplying effect if a more economics oriented planning is put into selection of works under MGNREGA.
Majority of the works as selected because the beneficiaries demand work and somehow they have to be provided work within 15 days. Planning with an aim to improve the infrastructure the area has to be done and priority has to be given to timely implementation of the planned work. Advices with regard to this should be collected from experts and it’s advisable to have a committee of economic advisors with regard to MGNREGA in each panchayath.

The quality of assets created should be improved and an effective mechanism has to be set up to review the quality of the assets created. The effectiveness of land development work taken up has to be ensured as majority of the works are taken up in this head. Effective parameters have to be setup to measure the effectiveness of implementation of these works.

An effective mechanism has to be setup to ensure that the workers are engaged in productive activities when they are at the work site. Due to lack of full time monitoring system for the amount of work put in, there seems to be very less work put in compared to the work put in by an unskilled worker outside MGNREGA.

More of awareness has to be given with regard to enrolment in MGNREGA. The fact that there is no age limit for working in MGNREGA has to reach the masses and more of elder people who are willing to work have to be brought into the scheme. There should be flexibility in types of work that can be taken up under MGNREGA in each area depending on the local needs and necessities. There should be a provision to add works that are of local importance as the circumstances demand.

In most of the rural areas day care facility for babies are not available. If this is provided, more women can be attracted to MGNREGA. In addition, it is important to add some minimum social security such as maternity leave and benefits and health insurance.
The prevailing wages offered in MGNREGA is lower than the wage rate in the study area for unskilled work. A wage pattern depending on the prevailing wage rate in the concerned area may be adopted so that workers with higher productivity get attracted to MGNREGA. Since the wage rate is lower than the prevailing market rate the productivity of workers in MGNREGA is comparatively lower.

The 100 days ceiling for the number of days of work may be removed and a provision for more number of days of work may be highly recommended. The maximum of 100 days of work per job card seems to be very low since in many of the job cards there are more than one person eligible for work. As the wages are very low compared to the prevailing wage rate in the study area and if the number of days of work are also restricted, at least some of the beneficiaries who wish to make MGNREGA as their only source of income would find it difficult to meet both the ends.

Considering the agricultural labourers as a special case with regard to number of days of work given may be advisable. The agricultural labourers may be given more work during off seasons and the 100 days of work ceiling should not be enforced on the agricultural labourers. This can ensure round the year employment for agricultural labourers and small farmers and this can ensure them a steady flow of income even in the case of bad crop.

Special assistance has to be give to senior citizens who are part of the scheme. Due to lack of literacy most of them find it difficult to meet to the requirements like opening a bank account, filling of application forms, etc. Training sessions may be organised to educate payment procedure of bank or post office to make the process less hectic.