ABSTRACT

Rural life in India is characterised by poverty, unemployment, and poor and inadequate infrastructure. Though the development of rural areas was given much stress in the various schemes designed for the development of the economy, unemployment rate has been on the increase. Report on Employment and Unemployment Survey 2012-13 estimated an unemployment rate of 4.7 per cent at the all India level. In the rural sector, agriculture and allied activities accounted for most of the employment till 1980. But diversification of employment as a result of increased expenditure by the Central and State Governments, along with increase in subsidy during the 1980s, resulted in an overall growth of rural employment. However, the fate of the self-employment and wage-employment programmes implemented by the Central Govt. over the years in the country was not so appreciable. As the previous programmes suffered serious inadequacies at the rural level, a new employment programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, was implemented in 2005. It is the only programme in the history of India’s development initiatives, which has been in force with the enactment of an Act of Parliament. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is a special piece of legislation which provides for the enhancement of the livelihood security of the rural households of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members volunteered to do unskilled manual work.

The Act was implemented in Kerala in a phased manner since 2006, and from 2008 it has covered all the districts. The Panchayat Raj Institutions are in the central place in the planning and implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGA in the State. An important feature of the implementation of the Scheme in Kerala is that women are contributing 93.43 per cent of the work force. Nearly 14.97 lakh households were provided employment under the Scheme during 2013-14, which accounts for 99.05 per cent of the households that demanded employment. During the eight years of its implementation, man-days generated in Kerala grew at an average rate of 52.27 per cent as against the all India average of 57.12 per cent.

The present study was pursued to examine the different facets of implementation of the Scheme. The registration process of beneficiaries, issue of Job Cards, and allotment of beneficiaries for work and asset creation under the Scheme, are primarily looked into. The problems in the implementation of the Scheme are also identified. Three samples including 600 beneficiaries, 220 worksite Mates, and 36 officers involved in the implementation, were selected for the study. The study found trouble-free and efficient process of Job Card registration and management and, satisfactory worksite facilities and worksite management under the Scheme. The process of wage payment under the Scheme is also found to be efficient though anomalies at the minimal level are existing. Noticeably, rural durable assets creation is found to be meagre. Problems faced in the implementation of the Scheme, both at the officers’ level and at the worksite Mates’ level, revealed even minute disruptions to be remedied. Improper Action Plans by Gram Panchayats, shortage of staff at the Blocks and Gram Panchayats to look after the Scheme, and inefficient management of worksites by Mates are severe problems badly affecting the implementation of the Scheme in Kerala.