

## **MGNREGA and Participatory Governance in Rajasthan**

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### **Abstract**

*Evolving the design of the wage employment programs to more effectively fight poverty, the Government of India formulated the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005, a paradigm shift from earlier wage employment programs. With its legal framework and rights-based approach, NREGA provides employment to those who demand it. This is the largest ever public employment program visualized in human history. The successful implementation of NREGS can improve the safety nets and eliminating hardcore poor. This paper is based on an empirical study done in Two districts of Rajasthan, Dungarpur and Karauli. These two districts were selected because two districts were included in the phase one of implementation of NREGA in the state. NREGA is operational in these districts since its beginning in Feb, 2006. The other reason for selecting these districts was that in both districts number of Scheduled tribe, Scheduled caste and other backward caste is very high in the total population of the district. Dungarpur is a tribal majority district. One of the objective of the NREGA is to strengthen local democracy at the grassroot level. Gram sabha will decide what type of work will be done in the panchayat, will prepare Labour budget and Annual budget. As brought out by several studies, Caste and Patriarchy are quite entrenched in the traditional society of Rajasthan. So in this background, the objectives of the study were to describe participatory planning in the implementation of NREGA, to find out the level of participation of Women ,SC,ST and differently able in Gram Sabha for preparation of annual plan and labour budget and to find out strategies for better planning and implementation of NREGA.*

**Key words-** *Participatory Governance, Transparency, Accountability, Right to information and Social Audit.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), 2005 is landmark legislation in Indian history of social security legislation after independence. Enacted after a successful struggle for an employment guarantee legislation, this legislation is a partial victory towards a full-fledged right to employment in any developing country context.

For the first time, right to work has been made a legal compulsion and entitlement for unemployment allowances in case of non-allotment of employment assured through this act. What is considered to be crucial is the empowerment of the poor through the provision of a right-based law, which would act as a strong safety net in the lack of alternative employment opportunities for poor people. The other key attributes of this scheme are time bound guarantee, labor-intensive work, decentralized participatory planning, women empowerment, work site facilities, and above all, transparency and accountability through the provision of social audits and right to information. NREGA is a unique and unprecedented effort in strengthening grass-root democracy in India. For the first time, the Indian state has legally mandated the implementation of mechanism that strengthen transparency and accountability at every step of the delivery chain, by creating platform for citizens to articulate their voice and directly engage with the state. This legal mandate has been the catalyst for state government across the country to innovate with different tools to strengthen accountability (Aiyar & Samji: 2009).

### **Salient Features of NREGA**

Evolving the design of the wage employment programs to more effectively fight poverty, the Government of India formulated the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in 2005, a paradigm shift from earlier wage employment programs. With its legal framework and rights-based approach, NREGA provides employment to those who demand it. This is the largest ever public employment program visualized in human history. The successful implementation of NREGS can improve the safety nets and eliminating hardcore poor (Rao: 2007).

Major objectives of NREGA are:

- To enhance livelihood securities through the provision of minimum 100 days of employment to a rural household based on their demand
- To create durable assets and strengthen the livelihood resource base of the rural poor
- Strong social safety net for the vulnerable groups by providing a fall-back employment source, when other employment alternatives are scarce or inadequate
- Growth engine for sustainable development of an agricultural economy
- Empowerment of rural poor through the processes of a rights-based law
- New ways of doing business, as a model of governance reform anchored on the principles of transparency and grass root democracy.

The design of the NREGS program is unique in being largely demand driven and the introduction of entitlement of unemployment allowances in case of non-allotment of employment. Undoubtedly, the NREGA has addressed many of the weaknesses of the earlier programs through the introduction of rights-based framework, time bound accession to fulfill guarantee, incentive and disincentive structures, demand based resource availability and accountability.

The Rights-based design of MGNREGA has a genesis in the preceding wage employment programmes. Almost all the rights related features of MGNREGA are inherited from previous wage employment programme. The rights based framework was inherited from Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act 1977. Under MGNREGA, apart from guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been vested with the responsibility of planning,

implementation and monitoring of activities taken up under the scheme. MGNREGA made the demand factor a conscious strategy as a Right to obtain employment. Financial obligations both of the Centre and the State are part of the legal framework. The MGNREGA guidelines also detail operational and

MGNREGA workers in action<sup>13</sup> administrative modalities of implementation seeking to address the limitations of the earlier wage employment programmes, placing greater emphasis, for example on planning processes, and MIS for improving data management.

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GP is also one of the most responsible stakeholders in successful implementation of NREGS program. GP is responsible for creating awareness about the scheme, receiving application, register names, issue of job cards, provide employment to the job seeker and also keeping records of the works under NREGS. Along with this, GP has to prepare self schemes to provide employment within the stipulated 15 days of demand, and to provide timely wage. It also has to make arrangement for enough funds for wage payment. GP is also responsible for redress complaints lodged by people. GP has to publish and update the data related to implementation of NREGA in the specified hoarding in proactive disclosure format.

### **Participatory Planning**

From its roots in needs-based development in the 1970s and 1980s to its widespread adoption by mainstream agencies and policy-makers in the global shift from governing to governance in the 1990s (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Kooiman, 1993), participation has emerged as a core concept underpinning local and national development policies and strategies alike. Its ascension to the mainstream in international development circles is possibly best exemplified by its adoption by the World Bank and other donors as a central concept underpinning both national-level Poverty Reduction Strategies. For proponents of participation, its advantages lie in its capacity to foster a sense of shared purpose, ownership and responsibility among fractured communities, in the process, building social capital and enhancing state legitimacy ( DFID, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2007; World Bank, 2011 ).

Some are strident in their criticism, notably the contributors to the provocatively entitled Participation: The New Tyranny? (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) who, focusing largely on micro level participatory rural appraisals, argue that so-called participatory approaches often fail to engage with issues of power and politics, in the process depoliticizing local development processes.

**Objectives of the study**

This paper is based on an empirical study done in Two districts of Rajasthan, Dungarpur and Karauli. These two districts were selected because two districts were included in the phase one of implementation of NREGA in the state. NREGA is operational in these districts since its beginning in Feb, 2006. The other reason for selecting these districts was that in both districts number of Scheduled tribe, Scheduled caste and other backward caste is very high in the total population of the district. Dungarpur is a tribal majority district. One of the objective of the NREGA is to strengthen local democracy at the grassroot level. Gram sabha will decide what type of work will be done in the panchayat, will prepare Labour budget and Annual budget. As brought out by several studies, Caste and Patriarchy are quite entrenched in the traditional society of Rajasthan. So in this background, the objectives of the study were to describe participatory planning in the implementation of NREGA, to find out the level of participation of Women ,SC,ST and differently able in Gram Sabha for preparation of annual plan and labour budget and to find out strategies for better planning and implementation of NREGA.

**II. Findings of the study**

**Socio-economic profile of the workers**

**Table - 1**

**Gender wise distribution of respondents**

	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	43	28.7	107	71.3	150	100.0
Karauli	44	29.3	106	70.7	150	100.0
Total	87	29.0	213	71.0	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur, Men constitute 28.7% of total respondents and women constitute 71.3% of total respondents.
- In Karauli, Men constitute 29.3% of total respondents and women constitute 70.7% of total respondents.
- So total from both districts, **women constitute 71% of respondents** and Men constitute 29% of total respondents.

**Table - 2**

**Caste/Category wise distribution of respondents**

	General		Backward Class		Scheduled Caste		Scheduled Tribe		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	14	9.3	6	4.0	20	13.3	110	73.3	150	100.0
Karauli	0	.0	40	26.7	66	44.0	44	29.3	150	100.0
Total	14	4.7	46	15.3	86	28.7	154	51.3	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur, respondents from General category constitute 9.3% of total respondents, from backward class constitute 4% of total respondents, Scheduled caste constitute 13.3% and **Scheduled tribe constitute 73.3% of total respondents.**
- In Karauli, No respondent from general category, 26.7% from OBC, **44% from Scheduled caste** and 29.3% from Scheduled tribe.

- So from both districts general respondents constitute 4.7%,OBC constitute 15.3%,Scheduled caste constitute 28.7% and Scheduled tribe constitute 51.3% of total respondents.

**Table No. 3**  
**Caste wise distribution of respondents holding land in each district**

		Land holder					
		Yes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	General	14	100.0	0	.0	14	100.0
	Backward Class	6	100.0	0	.0	6	100.0
	Scheduled Caste	0	.0	20	100.0	20	100.0
	Scheduled Tribe	102	93.6	7	6.4	109	100.0
	Total	122	81.9	27	18.1	149	100.0
Karauli	General	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0
	Backward Class	39	97.5	1	2.5	40	100.0
	Scheduled Caste	1	1.5	65	98.5	66	100.0
	Scheduled Tribe	40	90.9	4	9.1	44	100.0
	Total	80	53.3	70	46.7	150	100.0
Total	General	14	100.0	0	.0	14	100.0
	Backward Class	45	97.8	1	2.2	46	100.0
	Scheduled Caste	1	1.2	85	98.8	86	100.0
	Scheduled Tribe	142	92.8	11	7.2	153	100.0
	Total	202	67.6	97	32.4	299	100.0

- In Dungarpur, 100% respondents from General category own land, 100% respondents from OBC own land, **100% respondents from Schedules caste do not own land** and 93.6% from Schedule tribe own land.
- In Karauli,97.5% respondents from OBC own land,**98.5% from schedule caste do not own land**, 90.9% from Schedule Tribe own land.

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**Table - 4**  
**Distribution of Respondents as per their source of Awareness about NREGA**

	Source of information about MNREGA									
	Members of the Panchayat		Radio/T.V./New s Paper		Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)		Community People		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	138	92.0	0	.0	0	.0	12	8.0	150	100.0
Karauli	111	74.0	0	.0	0	.0	39	26.0	150	100.0
Total	249	83.0	0	.0	0	.0	51	17.0	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur, for 92% of respondents members of panchayat are source of awareness about NREGA
- In Karauli, for 74% of respondents members of panchayat are source of awareness about NREGA and 26% of respondents got to know about NREGA from community people.

**Table - 5**  
**Distribution of Respondents as per the dated receipt for their Application for job in NREGA**

	Provision of dated receipt in NREGA							
	Yes		No		Do not know		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	0	.0	148	98.7	2	1.3	150	100.0
Karauli	0	.0	150	100.0	0	.0	150	100.0
Total	0	.0	298	99.3	2	.7	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur,98.7% of respondents did not get dated receipt for their application
  - In Karauli,**100% of respondents did not** get dated receipt for their application.
- So when they donot give dated receipt,they will not have to give unemployment allowance.This is deliberately done.During focused group discussion,it came out that the mates take their thumb impression for 100 days in advance without writing date on the application. So whenever work comes, they give them work as per their wishes. This is done to show that they give work with in 15 days of applying but in actual practice, it never happens.*

**Table - 6**  
**Distribution of Respondents as per their awareness about official wage rate**

	Awareness about official wage rate					
	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	13	8.7	137	91.3	150	100.0
Karauli	3	2.0	147	98.0	150	100.0
Total	16	5.3	284	94.7	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur,91.3% respondents are not aware about official wage rate.
- In Karauli, 98% respondents are not aware about official wage rate.
- In Dungarpur,92.9% respondents from general category ,100% respondents from OBC,100% respondents from SC, and 89.1% respondents from ST are **not aware about official wage rate**. In Karauli,100% respondents from OBC,100% respondents from SC and 93.2% respondents from ST are not aware about official wage rate. So they are never paid full wages. In Dungarpur,46.7% respondents replied discrimination in getting work while in Karauli,52.7% respondents replied discrimination in getting work.

**Table - 7**  
**Distribution of Respondents as per their satisfaction about measurement of work**

	Satisfaction with the measurement of work					
	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	36	24.0	114	76.0	150	100.0
Karauli	65	43.3	85	56.7	150	100.0
Total	101	33.7	199	66.3	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur,76% respondents are not satisfied with the measurement of work at the worksites.
- In Karauli 57% respondents are not satisfied with the measurement of work at the worksites Since the measurement of work is not done properly, they are never paid full wages. They are paid less than half of the official wage rate.
- In Dungarpur,98.7% respondents are not aware about Right to Information Act and in Karauli ,100% respondents are not aware about RTI Act.

- In Dungarpur, 7 % respondents from General category are aware about RTI and 100% respondents from OBC, SC and 99.1% from ST are not aware about RTI.
- In Karauli 100% respondents from OBC, SC and ST are not aware about RTI.

**Table - 8**  
**Distribution of Respondents as per their response against Time gap between completion of work and payment of wages**

	Time gap between completion of work and payment of wages									
	Within one week		Within 15 days		Within one month		Beyond one month		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	1	.7	4	2.7	63	42.0	82	54.7	150	100.0
Karauli	0	.0	0	.0	2	1.3	148	98.7	150	100.0
Total	1	.3	4	1.3	65	21.7	230	76.7	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur, 54.7% of respondents have been paid wages after more than one month of completion of work.
- In Karauli, 98.7% of the respondents have been paid wages after more than one month of completion of work.
- In Dungarpur, 99.3% respondents did not get compensation for delayed payment of wages
- In Karauli, 98.7 % respondents did not get any compensation for delayed payment of wages.

**Table No.9**  
**Gender wise distribution of respondents as per their participation in discussion on Annual Plan of NREGA in Gram Sabha**

		Participated in discussion of annual plan of NREGA in gram sabha							
		Yes		No		Not Applicable/Do not know		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	Male	17	39.5	14	32.6	12	27.9	43	100.0
	Female	24	22.4	29	27.1	54	50.5	107	100.0
	Total	41	27.3	43	28.7	66	44.0	150	100.0
Karauli	Male	1	2.3	19	43.2	24	54.5	44	100.0
	Female	3	2.8	41	38.7	62	58.5	106	100.0
	Total	4	2.7	60	40.0	86	57.3	150	100.0
Total	Male	18	20.7	33	37.9	36	41.4	87	100.0
	Female	27	12.7	70	32.9	116	54.5	213	100.0
	Total	45	15.0	103	34.3	152	50.7	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur, 11.6% men and 9.3% women participated in Gram sabha Meeting, while in Karauli 4.5% Men and 0.9% women participated in gram sabha meeting.
- In Dungarpur, 28.6% respondents from general category, 16.7% respondents from OBC, **None from SC** and 9.1% from ST participated in meeting of gram sabha.
- In Karauli, None from OBC, None from SC and 6.8% from ST participated in the meeting of gram sabha.

So Participation of workers in Gram sabha meeting is very less in both these districts *and Participation of SC in gram sabha is ZERO in both districts.*

- In Dungarpur, 39.5% Men and 22.4% of women respondents participated in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA in Gram sabha
- In karauli, 2.3% Men and 2.8% women participated in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA in Gram Sabha

- In Dungarpur 50% respondents from General category,33.3% of respondents from OBC,15% from SC and 26.4% from ST participated in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA in gram sabha.
- In Karauli 5% respondents from OBC,1.5% from SC and 2.3 % from ST participated in discussion of annual plan of NREGA.

**Table No. 10**  
**Gender wise distribution of respondents having say in decision Making**

		Allowed to speak in the discussion							
		Yes		No		Not Applicable/Do not know		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Dungarpur	Male	11	25.6	12	27.9	20	46.5	43	100.0
	Female	18	16.8	16	15.0	73	68.2	107	100.0
	Total	29	19.3	28	18.7	93	62.0	150	100.0
Karauli	Male	1	2.3	1	2.3	42	95.5	44	100.0
	Female	2	1.9	4	3.8	100	94.3	106	100.0
	Total	3	2.0	5	3.3	142	94.7	150	100.0
Total	Male	12	13.8	13	14.9	62	71.3	87	100.0
	Female	20	9.4	20	9.4	173	81.2	213	100.0
	Total	32	10.7	33	11.0	235	78.3	300	100.0

- In Dungarpur,25.6% of Men respondents are allowed say in the decision making on NREGA and 16.8% of women respondents are allowed to speak in the discussion.
- In karauli,2.3 %of men respondents are allowed to speak in the discussion on NREGA while 1.9% of women respondents are allowed to speak in the discussion on NREGA in gram sabha.
- In Dungarpur,35.7% of respondents from general category,33.3 from OBC,0% from SC and 20% from ST are allowed to speak in the discussion on NREGA.
- In Karauli,5% from OBC,0% from SC and 2.3% from ST are allowed to speak in the discussion on NREGA in Gram sabha.
- In Dungarpur 51.2% of respondents were given awareness in gram sabha on NREGA and they participated in Gram sabha and 55.8% of respondents who were given awareness did not participate in Gram sabha
- In Karauli,75% of respondents who were given awareness in the gram sabha participated in the discussion of annual plan and 28.3% of respondents who were given awareness did not participate in the discussion.
- In Dungarpur, respondents got Average of 80 days of work in 2012-13 and 81 days of work in 2013-14
- In Karauli, respondents got 27 days of work in 2012-13 and 26 days in 2013-14 .
- In Dungarpur ,respondents who participated in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA got 84 days of work, those who did not participate got 76 days of work
- In karauli, respondents who participated in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA got 32 days of work and those who did not got 23 days of work.
- In Dungarpur,51.2% of respondents who replied that work from NREGA has improved their sources of livelihood also participated in the annual plan discussion of NREGA.
- In Karauli 96.7% of those who replied Work of NREGA has not improved their source of livelihood did not participate in the discussion of annual plan of NREGA .

So from the above findings, it is clear that compared to Karauli, In Dungarpur, because of pressure from district administration there is some participation of people in planning of NREGA work in gram sabha. Tribes constitute 65% of the total population of Dungarpur.It is at the bottom of Human development index of Rajasthan.Agricultural productivity is very less because of lack of irrigation facilities. So programmes like NREGA is very much required in the district. It came out from FGD that this participation is also token

participation. Since Panchayat have to fulfill the rule of required quorum of attendance in Gram sabha, they ask people to come to Gram sabha. In the name of discussion, they ask people to write their demands on piece of paper and give it to them. Participation of women is very less and participation of SC is zero. When they go to attend gram sabha with their demands, they are told "you don't know anything, what you will do here, you go".

### **III. Conclusion**

In both these districts, Participatory planning is only symbolic, Awareness about key features of NREGA is very low among people, they are not aware that it is a rights based programme. For making annual plan, though some people are called for gram sabha but discussion never happens, they are told to write their demand on paper and submit it to panchayat office. But Panchayat never looks on those demands. So people have lost interest in Gram sabha meetings.

Participation of women, SCs and STs is very low and they are asked to attend gram sabha for completing the quorum only. So it is panchayat members and secretary and local elite who decide what work will be done under NREGA in Panchayat contrary to the provisions of NREGA. Though they are providing average of 80 days of work to people, in some panchayats it is 100 days also but it is happening under pressure from District administration. Since poverty is high in the district income from NREGA has provided food security to the workers. So against the provisions of the act, workers (100%) never filled form -6 to demand work, it is mates who fill the form of their own selected people and ask them to come for work. So planning is still top down and not bottom-up. There is lot of corruption in measurement of work and attendance is also given to selected people who do not come for work. So there is forgery in filling of Muster rolls. So people do not get full wages, they get less than half of official wage rate and majority of them are not aware of official wage rate. *So even if people get 100 days of work this does not mean that the programme is successful because they are not getting full wages and wages are paid late sometimes after two months.* In Karauli also gram sabha is not called regularly and participation of women and Particularly Scheduled caste in gram sabha is very low. Though participation of women as workers is very high, they are not given opportunity to participate in annual plan discussion and preparation of labour budget in a highly patriarchal environment. Caste system is quite entrenched and people fear speaking to dominant caste. So in both these districts no one has ever filed any complaint officially fearing the displeasure of dominant panchayat functionaries who threaten them that if they complain they will not get benefit of any govt. programme in future. *So one solution is formation of association of workers as is provided in NREGA.* But association of workers has not been formed. Majority of people were of opinion that if there is association of workers then they can forcefully put their due demands in gram sabha meetings and this will help them in getting work when they need it. Other strategy which has been successfully adopted by states like Andhra Pradesh is for panchayats to voluntarily seek co-operation of NGOs in planning, implementation and social audit of NREGA. In Rajasthan NGOs like MKSS and Aastha which did social audit in 2006 in Dungarpur found lot of irregularities and instances of corruption by panchayat functionaries. So panchayat presidents violently opposed their participation in NREGA. In Rajasthan Association of Panchayat presidents opposed the involvement of NGOs in NREGA and state government bowed to their pressure. So social audit is done by a team selected by district administration. So social audit is also symbolic and is done to complete the formality. Though instances of corruption are rampant, no action till date has been taken against any official. So people have lost faith in authorities implementing NREGA and this is also a major reason why people do not want to participate in Gram Sabha and social audit. So there is an urgent need to involve NGOs like MKSS and Aastha who have expertise in planning, doing social audit, conducting need based assessment and creating awareness among people on NREGA and RTI. For successfully implementing NREGA and for ensuring participatory planning, NGOs and SHGs should be involved and state government should take steps and give direction to District administration in this respect. To ensure broad based representation of people in need based assessment and planning, planning of NREGA work should be done at ward sabha level which is not happening. There is need to create awareness among people on key aspects of NREGA as well as about Right to information Act which is an integral part of NREGA by NGOs, SHGs and People's Organisation. In a block where there is a people's organization supported by Aastha, an NGO, there the participation of women and tribals is high in gram sabha meetings for Preparing annual plan. Appointing leaders of women SHGs as well as people from schedule caste as members of Vigilance and monitoring committees and as mates will also help in enhancing their confidence and ensure more participation in planning in gram sabha. There is need to do capacity building of panchayat functionaries on NREGA and its implementation on regular basis. In Many panchayats adequate staff to implement NREGA has not been provided. Further at block level BDO is also programme officer and Man power at block level and district level is also not adequate for successful implementation of the programme.



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