



# **Role of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in Socio-economic Development in Hoshiarpur District of Punjab**

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) aimed at providing direct employment to the deserving rural people has been in operation for last many years. The present study had conducted to assess the role of NREGA programme with the following specific objectives: (i) To study socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries of NREGA (ii) To assess the contribution of NREGA in socio-economic development of its beneficiaries (iii) To identify the factors of success and failure (iv) To render suitable suggestions for further improvement in the NREGA programme. Research gap of this study was to analyze the profitability of social programmes being initiated by governments. Results showed Socio-economic profile of the respondents that most of the respondents were male, in the middle age group, hailing from Schedule Caste category and were having little education and low income level. The profile of beneficiaries of NREGA programme indicated that the benefits of this programme is going to the deserving people. Rural connectivity (repair of roads etc.), village cleanliness, plantation were the major areas in which the NREGA beneficiaries worked under the supervision of a Mate. The village Sarpanch proved to be the major person who made aware to the beneficiary and helped them to get employment under this programme. On an average beneficiary of NREGA got employment for 15 days in a month. All the beneficiaries of the NREGA programme got prescribed wage i.e. Rs.123 per day which was paid timely to the respondents. 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the

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respondents held that dependency on the farmers had reduced after joining NREGA programme and also wage rate had increased in other activities in villages due to the arrival of NREGA programme. 38 per cent of the respondents opined that NREGA activities helped them to remove idleness whereas 25 per cent of respondents felt more social recognized after joining NREGA. Overall the launching of NREGA programme had increased the demand for labour in rural areas. The non beneficiary of NREGA programme did not join the NREGA largely due to social inhibition (not ready to do labour in own village), low wage rate and irregularity of work. Irregular grants and work opportunities, less wage rate were the major constrains experienced by the beneficiaries of NREGA. Regularity in grants, generating adequate employment opportunity may prove more useful for NREGA beneficiary and society at large.

*Keywords: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act; rural development; employment opportunity; rural connectivity; Sarpanch.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic development of weaker sections of the society has been the prime agenda of the government formed after independence in India. Various programmes have been experimented for the development of rural people, in India in the last six decades [1]. Right from the Community Development Programme (1952) till Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (2000), there is a long list of rural development programme implemented in India for socio-economic welfare of the rural people. As the benefits of rural development programmes were not percolating down, since 1970 more attention was given by government towards the poorer section [2]. All the rural development programmes implemented till 2006 showed some achievements during their times but no programme could give guarantee regarding to the employment. With a view of provide guaranteed employment, Indian government started National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) [which is presently known as Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)] [3,4]. In this scheme, there is a legal guarantee for 100 days employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult member volunteer to do unskilled manual work at the minimum wage rate prescribed in a state or else an unemployment allowance to enable them to achieve socio-economic betterment [5]. In the first phase, it was implemented in 200 most backward districts of India, in 2007, NREGA covered another 130 districts and from April, 2008, the Act is implemented in all the districts of the country [2].

In this paper an effort is made to assess the role of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in socio-economic development in Hoshiarpur District.

## 1.1 Objectives of the Study

1. To study procedural efficiency of NREGA and major works undertaken in this programme.
2. To assess the role of NREGA in social – economic development of the beneficiaries.
3. To identify the factors which hamper NREGA's success and reasons for not joining this programme.
4. To render suitable suggestions for further improvement in the NREGA programme.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on the study conducted in Hoshiarpur district. This district was chosen purposively as it was the first district of Punjab where NREGA programme was launched in 2006. From ten blocks of Hoshiarpur district, two blocks namely Tanda and Dasuya were taken for study. Dasuya having the highest number of beneficiaries while Tanda was possessing less number of beneficiaries of NREGA at the time of study. Two villages each namely Harsi Pind and handali Narungpur from Tanda block and Badla and Dadiyal from Dasuya block were taken randomly. From the lists of NREGA beneficiaries of selected blocks and villages, 60 beneficiary respondents (30 from each block) were selected. Further, 60 non beneficiaries respondents who were possessing by and large and similar socio-economic characteristics but did not join NREGA, were selected for data collection. Data were collected personally with the help of a structured and pre-tested interview schedule. Some tables are not given in the text for sake of brevity. Data were collected personally with the help of structured and pre-tested interview schedule developed for the study. NREGA workers were identified in the village from their work field. Non

NREGA beneficiaries were also identified. The respondents were made clear about the purpose of study and were made assured that the data would be used only for research work. The whole data has been classified into the NREGA beneficiary and Non-beneficiary. 60 respondents were working under NREGA and 60 were not working under NREGA. Masters tables for the data collected were prepared and the data were quantified for precise and systematic analysis and interpretation. The qualitative data were quantified to work out percentage and apply other statistical tests.

As regards the sample of respondents the socio-economic characteristics of them indicated that most of the beneficiary respondents were between 31-40 years, hailed from Hindu religion and Sikh religion, were from Schedule Caste. As far as education level for concerned, it was found from the data that 46% of the beneficiaries were illiterate and 18% of the beneficiaries were matriculate. On the other hand 35% of non-beneficiaries were matriculate. On the other hand 35% of non-beneficiaries were matriculate. More than half (65%) of the beneficiary respondents held that they were having annual income of Rs.10000-15000 while 70 per cent of the non-beneficiaries were having annual income of more than Rs.250000. Most of the respondents were living in nuclear families. The data pertaining to beneficiaries of NREGA indicated that benefits of this programme are, by and large, going to the deserving ones.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Source of Awareness Regarding NREGA and Main Person who Helped Them about NREGA

What was the source of information about NREGA who helped them for getting work in it? This question was put to the respondents and the data (T.1) revealed that majority of respondents (63.33%) got to know about NREGA from Sarpanchs of their respective village while 35% of the respondents got this information through their friends and 1.67% respondents came to know about this Act through relatives. Overall data is indicated that village Sarpanch proved to be the main source of awareness about NREGA programme [6,7]. Another issue which probed during study was the person who helped the beneficiaries to join NREGA programme and the data in this regard indicated that a large number of respondents (88%) were helped/encouraged

by village Sarpanch to join NREGA programme. 6.67 per cent of respondents were also encouraged by State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) and only 5 per cent were encouraged by the fellow villagers of the beneficiaries. Overall table indicated that village Sarpanch was main person who helped NREGA respondents to join programme.

**Table 1. Sources of awareness about NREGA and main person who helped them about NREGA. Source of awareness about NREGA**

Source of awareness about NREGA		
Source	Number	Percentage/Rank
Relatives	1	1.67 (3)
Friends	21	35.00 (2)
Sarpanch	38	63.33 (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Main person who helped to contact NREGA		
Particulars	Number	Percentage/Rank
Fellow villagers	3	5.00 (3)
Village Sarpanch	53	88.33 (1)
SEGC	4	6.67 (2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### 3.2 Time in Getting Work under NREGA

As per NREGA Act, beneficiaries of NREGA programme can get work within 15 days from the application submitted for seeking under NREGA. During the field work efforts were made to find out whether the beneficiaries got the desired work within the strive limit or not. It came out that only negligible (3.33%) percentage of respondents got work within 15 days, 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the respondents got the work within 15 to 30 days. While majority of them (63.33%) took much longer time i.e. more than 30 days to get the work under NREGA which indicated beneficiaries of NREGA waited for long time to get the work under NREGA programme.

**Table 2. Time in getting work under NREGA**

Particulars	Number	Percentage
Up to 15 days	2	3.33
15-30 days	20	33.33
More than 30 days	38	63.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Z-value (<30 vs >30days) = 2.92\*\*\**

#### 3.3 Kind of Works under NREGA

What kind of works are being done under NREGA in the area of study? An effort was made to know the ground reality. Data indicated that

majority of the respondents (66.66%) were engaged in rural connectivity works like construction and repair of link roads etc. Hoshiarpur district bears different type of topography in Punjab where water conservation is also one of the important issues. So, these type of works were expected and it was supported by data also. About 11.66 per cent of the respondents were found engaged in work of plantation usually on road side or the open public places. 13.33 per cent of the respondents were engaged in cleanliness of village and ponds. Overall data indicated that most of the respondents were engaged in the works of construction and maintenance of rural roads followed by water conservation and plantation.

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to work under NREGA**

Kind of work	Number	Percentage rank
Rural connectivity	40	66.66 (1)
Water conservation	5	8.33 (4)
Plantation	7	11.66 (3)
Cleanliness of village and ponds	8	13.33 (2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to area and distance for work under NREGA**

Works	Number	Percentage
Within your village	58	96.67
Within the radius of 5 km	2	3.33
Out of the radius of 5 km		
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

### 3.4 Area and Distance of Work under NREGA

As per the NREGA Act, work should ordinarily be provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case work is provided beyond 5 km, extra wages of 10% are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses. The data collected on this question (Table 4) show that a large majority (97%) of the beneficiaries of NREGA were engaged in work in their respective village whereas only a few of them had to go for work outside their village. Data indicated that beneficiaries of NREGA programme were getting works in their respective villages.

### 3.5 Wage Rate, Regularity and Wage Rate for Men and Women

What is the wage rate of work under NREGA? Whether the people get regular of that work? These questions were also probed and the responses given in Table 5. All the respondents informed that they were getting wages as provided under Act i.e. Rs.123/- for a day and it was also encouraging that most of the beneficiaries (88.33%) were getting their wages regularly while 12 per cent told that there was irregularity in getting wages. On the question of difference in wages of men and women, it came out that all the beneficiaries were getting equal wages irrespective of their gender.

**Table 5. Distribution of respondents according to wage, regularity and wage rate**

Wage rate (Rs/day)	Rs.123	
Wage paid on time	Number	Percentage
Yes	53	88.33
No	7	11.66
Wage rate for men and women under NREGA		
Yes	60	100
No		

### 3.6 Occupational Change after Joining NREGA

One of the important issues of this study has been to assess whether there was occupational mobility among the beneficiaries of NREGA. To this 8.33 per cent of the respondents said that they use to do work in the fields of farmers in the village before joining NREGA, now they joined NREGA in which they have experienced little more freedom from the farmers. More than 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the beneficiaries was unemployed before joining NREGA. Now they have become part of NREGA schemes. After joining NREGA 98.33 per cent of the respondents were engaged in labour work. It seems an encouraging fact that NREGA started involving unemployed persons in productive works.

### 3.7 Priority to Spend Money

Priorities of different respondents differ with their income. It was quite important to know about the priority to spend the money which they got through NREGA wages [8,9]. During the course of study it was found that more than half of the

**Table 6. Distribution of respondents on the basis of occupational change after joining NREGA**

Particulars	Before		After		Z-value
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
<b>Main means of income</b>					
Agricultural labour	5	8.33	1	1.67	1.67NS
Unemployed	14	23.33	0	0.00	3.98***
labour	41	68.33	59	98.33	4.41***
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 7. Distribution of respondents on the basis of their priority of spending their money**

Priority to spend NREGA income	Number	Percentage	Rank
Health facilities	6	10.00	(3)
Education	6	10.00	(3)
Sanitation	7	11.67	(2)
Household needs	35	58.33	(1)
Social ceremonies	6	10.00	(3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>	

respondents (58.33%) were willing to spend their income through NREGA on their household needs, as it the main need of any family to be fulfilled. 11.67 per cent answered that their main priority to spend the money on sanitation, 10 per cent wanted to spend their money on health facility, 10 per cent of respondents gave priority to education and 10 per cent wanted to spend their money on social ceremonies. So it can be concluded that most of the respondents wanted to spend their wages which they get from NREGA on household needs [10,11].

### 3.8 Impact of NREGA on Economic Aspect of Beneficiaries

Table 8 indicate the economic impact of NREGA on the beneficiaries of NREGA. Data indicated that 58.33 per cent beneficiary respondents felt that main economic impact of NREGA had been the increase in their wage rate. Now they get more wages under NREGA. It was also tried to know whether beneficiary respondents had created some durable assets with the help of NREGA and the data indicated that 11.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents opined that they were able to create assets with the help of NREGA, mean they can have economic benefits from created assets. During the field work respondents replied that relief from economic dependence on others have given them a sense of confidence. Similarly economic independence was also found to be encouraging as 28.33 per cent of the beneficiary respondents replied that now they feel more economically independent. Data show that 21.66 per cent of the beneficiary

respondent felt that dependence on the farmers has reduced due to NREGA. 11.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents told that it had increased the employment opportunities which give them more chance to earn They were getting more options to choose where they want to work. 11.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents opined that it had reduced their indebtedness. Amount of debt had decreased after getting engage with NREGA. Further 6.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents replied that its main economic impact was that it increased the rural connectivity through which they were getting more chance to connect with world. Whereas 8.33 per cent of beneficiary respondents opined that it had shifted the mode of labour. On the whole data indicated that after joining NREGA, beneficiaries under the study area recognized it as a good act which increased the wage rate, the economic independence, rural connectivity, durable assets, reduced indebtedness, and created more job opportunities for the people [12,13].

### 3.9 Social Impact

Social development of the beneficiaries through economic development have been one of the important objectives of by and large all the rural development programs started by Indian government from time to time [14-16]. NREGA contains some optimistic objectives in which social impact and social objectives have a special place. The result discussed in the Table 9 indicated that 38.33 per cent of the beneficiary respondents felt really better as far as their work

or job is concerned. 25 per cent of the beneficiary respondents told that now they feel more socially recognized. Now many people know about them and their activity and show more interest in interacting with them. Data further show that 28.33 per cent of the beneficiary respondents recognized social equality as the most important social impact of NREGA on the respondents. Every person has a particular place in this society. The person who is earning will have more respect in the society. Now beneficiary respondents felt that they get equal place in the society. And they can contribute more to the society because their interaction has also increased now. On the issue of empowerment to the women 26.66 per cent respondents opined that it has empowered women. After joining NREGA women's participation in social activities had been increased to a good extent and this encourage women empowerment in our society. Women respondents told that they become more self dependent now. Study further revealed that change in social status of poor people had become possible through this act. 16.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents felt that it has changed the social status As it is known that social status of a person depends on many aspects, but economic empowerment is very important for social aspect. Joining of NREGA further showed encouraging results as 25 per cent of the beneficiary respondents told that their inter personal relationships has become good after joining NREGA group. Data show that 16.66 per cent of beneficiary respondents felt that it had also effected the occupational change of poor people .30 per cent of the beneficiary respondents opined that NREGA gave a right to live with self respect which was also the main social impact. Had respondents felt any change regarding their standard of living after joining NREGA? Yes, in case of 26.66 per cent of the beneficiary respondents felt a positive change in their standard of living, as there was improvement in their houses, sanitation conditions, medical facilities etc. This was largely attributed to the change in their economic position after joining NREGA. Thus, on the whole results show that after joining NREGA respondents felt more confident as it had removed idleness of most of the respondents which directly or indirectly improve the living standard of the respondents. It provided a feeling of equality to the respondents and their social status increased. Their inter personal relationships had become good.

**Table 8. Distribution of respondents on the basis of economic impact of NREGA (Multiple responses)**

<b>Economic impact</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Shift in mode of labour	05 (8.33)	6
Dependence on farmers has reduced	13 (21.66)	4
Daily wage rate has gone up	35 (58.33)	1
Demand for labour has increased	15 (25.00)	3
Opportunities of work have increased due to NREGA	07 (11.66)	5
Increase in durable assets	07 (11.66)	5
Increase in rural connectivity	04 (6.66)	7
More economic independence	17 (28.33)	2
Decrease in indebtedness	07 (11.66)	5

### **3.10 Factors Responsible for NREGA's Failure**

During the course of study efforts were made to pin point the factor responsible for leading NREGA towards failure and the response in this regard is given in Table 10. Data revealed that less wage rate was the prime cause of failure. Data further showed that 23.33 per cent of the respondent's perceived NREGA wage is less. 20 per cent of the respondents said that irregularity of work was another cause of NREGA's failure. About 15 per cent of the respondents opined that less interest of worker in NREGA work was also main reason of its failure. Whereas 16.66 per cent of the respondents told that social barriers had been the biggest hurdle in joining NREGA. 10 per cent of the respondents told that the biasness in distributing work was also main factor of its failure. While 10 per cent of the respondents replied that there was lack of adequate work and 5 per cent replied that lack of facilities at work site (particularly for women) was also one of the important failure factors for NREGA.

### **3.11 Reason of Not Joining NREGA**

Efforts were made to pin point the reason for not joining the NREGA programme by the

**Table 9. Impact of NREGA on the social aspects of the beneficiaries (Multiple responses)**

Social impact	Beneficiaries	Rank
Social recognition	15 (25.00)	5
Feeling of equality in society	17 (28.33)	3
Women empowerment	16 (26.66)	4
Occupational change	10 (16.66)	6
Change in social status of poor people	10 (16.66)	6
Right to live with self respect	18 (30.00)	2
It removes idleness	23 (38.33)	1
Better inter-personal relationships	15 (25.00)	5
Good standard of living	16 (26.66)	4
Participation in social activities	10 (16.66)	6

**Table 10. Reasons for not joining NREGA (Non-beneficiaries)**

Reason	Number	Percentage
Less wage rate	15	25.00
Irregular work	17	28.33
Problems at village panchayat level	13	21.66
Social inhibition	15	25.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Table 11. Perceptions of non beneficiaries about NREGA (Multiple responses)**

Perceptions	Yes	No	Z-value
Fulfillment of responsibilities without NREGA	42 (70%)	18 (30%)	4.38***
NREGA would have helped to fulfill their responsibilities	29 (48.33%)	31 (51.67%)	0.36NS
NREGA payment is sufficient or not?	43 (71.67%)	17 (28.33%)	4.75***
Proper guidance for NREGA provided to them	40 (66.67%)	20 (33.33%)	3.65***
NREGA could have changed their status	22 (36.67%)	38 (63.33%)	2.92***
Helpful in reducing distress migration	45 (75%)	15 (25%)	5.48***
Helpful in reducing indebtedness	43 (71.66%)	17 (28.33%)	4.75***
Economic independence to women	36 (60%)	24 (40%)	2.19**
Increase in purchasing power	41 (68.33%)	19 (31.67%)	4.02***
NREGA is beneficial or not?	33 (55%)	27 (45%)	1.10NS

respondents and the data in regard is presented in Table number 10. The result showed that 28 per cent of the non beneficiary respondent did not join NREGA after observing irregularity in the NREGA works, 1/4<sup>th</sup> each of the respondent attributed less wage rate and social inhibitions to work in village as main reason for not joining NREGA programme. 21 per cent of the respondents held that they did not join NREGA as their were some problem at village panchayat level.

### 3.12 Perception of Non-beneficiaries

During the course of study efforts were made to know the perceptions of the non beneficiary respondents regarding NREGA programme. To the various queries 70 per cent opined that they were able to earn their livelihood and meeting socio-economic needs from the other

sources hence they did not join NREGA programme. Also they attributed non proper guidance (72%) as main reason for not joining NREGA programme. On the positive aspect 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the non beneficiary respondents maintained that NREGA seems helpful in reducing indebtedness of the people. Further they also told that the arrival of NREGA programme is providing independence to the women in the village and also increasing the purchasing power. 55 per cent of the respondents viewed NREGA programme as beneficial one for the people. However 72 per cent of the respondents told that wages given under NREGA are not sufficient.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Data were collected personally with the help of structured and pre-tested interview schedule

developed for the study. NREGA workers were identified in the village from their work field. Non NREGA beneficiaries were also identified. The respondents were made clear about the purpose of study and were made assured that the data would be used only for research work. Research gap of this study was to analyze the profitability of social programmes being initiated by governments. The study revealed that village Sarpanch proved to be the main source of awareness about NREGA programme and helped the respondents in getting works under this programme. As regards the state machinery's role, only 6.67% of respondents were also encouraged by State Employment Guarantee Council (SEGC) and 5% were encouraged by the fellow villagers of the beneficiaries for getting work under NREGA. A few of the beneficiaries (3.33%) got work within the stipulated time i.e. 15 days while 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the respondents got the work within 15 to 30 days and a vast majority of them (63.33%) took much longer the work under NREGA which indicated beneficiaries of NREGA waited for long time to get the work under NREGA programme. Rural connectivity, cleanliness of village and ponds, plantation and water conservation were the major works in which NREGA beneficiaries were engaged and most of them got work within their own village. Three fourth of the respondents work for 15 days in a month under NREGA while 22% informed that they work for 12 days in a month under NREGA. Majority of the respondents opined that the wages under NREGA were paid on time and the wage rate was same for men and women under NREGA. Most of the beneficiaries experienced occupational mobility with the arrival of NREGA programme [17,18]. To meet the household needs, followed by the health, education and sanitation were the priority areas for spending the money by the respondents. One of the important economic impact of NREGA has been the increase in wage rate and demand of the labour has increased and lot of women are also getting benefits from this programme. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the respondents experienced economic independence after joining this programme while 1/5<sup>th</sup> held that dependence on farmers has reduced, As regards the social impact NREGA programme proved helpful in removing idleness and beneficiaries experienced increased social recognition, self respect and improved living standard. Less wage rate, irregular and inadequate work, less interest of worker in NREGA, social inhibitions, lack of facilities at site of work were major factors making the NREGA a

non- success. On the issue of non joining to NREGA by the respondents data revealed that less wage rate, irregular works and social inhibition to work in own villages were major reasons for not joining the NREGA programme though they perceived this programme a good one which may prove beneficial to the needy in many ways. On the basis of the study some suggestions are being made which may be helpful to improve the functioning of the NREGA.

1. The grants for NREGA programme should be sanctioned regularly and timely so that interest of people should be maintained because many people join other works in absence of regular work under NREGA programme.
2. Wage rate under NREGA programme should be increase to attract the people in the programme as most of the non beneficiaries did not join NREGA programme largely due to less wage rate under NREGA. Wages should be fixed in between Rs.225 to 250 per day.
3. Appropriate work should be generated under NREGA programme so as to make this programme beneficial for the society.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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