

Assessment of Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges among the beneficiaries in MGNREGA works in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT: In rural areas, major livelihood activities are irregular mainly due to seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and allied activities. More than 60 per cent of total workforce in the country derives their livelihood from agriculture. The high dependency on agriculture has caused decrease in per capita household income from farm sector and use of labour-saving technologies (Mechanization) in agricultural production has resulted in lesser employment in the rural areas and causes poverty among the rural masses. MGNREGA is the largest work guarantee programme in the world with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households. For this study Salem district were purposively selected. In this district Panamarathupatty block has been selected with a sample size of 200 beneficiaries, the Probability sampling method was used for the selection of villages. One of the most effective methods of PRA *i.e.*, preferential ranking technique was used in this study for identifying the strength, weakness, opportunity and challenges faced by the beneficiaries in the MGNREGA works. The easy payment mechanism by banks was the first major strength with RBQ of 90.86, the direct transfer of wages to the beneficiaries' bank account reduces the complex mechanisms. Less interest on scheme due to higher wages in Urban Area were identified as the major weakness and ranked first among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 90.50. Creation of Assets in the village panchayat was ranked first opportunity among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 87.79. Lack of monitoring skills by worksite facilitators as the major challenge identified from the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 86.50 followed by overburden for gram panchayat with RBQ value of 73.60 and there is no separate worksite facilitators for the MGNREGA works in the panchayat.

Keywords: Livelihood, MGNREGA, Salem, SWOC, Worksite.

INTRODUCTION

In rural areas, major livelihood activities are irregular mainly due to seasonal fluctuations in agriculture and allied activities. This leads to periodic withdrawal from labour force, especially by the marginal laborers, who shift back and forth between what is reported as domestic and gainful work. Many workers migrate to other parts of the country in search of work. Lack of alternate livelihoods and skill development are the primary causes of migration from rural areas. More than 60 per cent of total workforce in the country derives their livelihood from agriculture. The high dependency

on agriculture has caused decrease in per capita household income from farm sector and use of labour-saving technologies (Mechanization) in agricultural production has resulted in lesser employment in the rural areas and causes poverty among the rural masses. An effective way to reduce the rural poverty could be to accelerate the work force in the rural areas, by providing continuous employment during non-agricultural seasons. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA or the 'Scheme'), enacted by the Indian parliament in September 2005, provides a legal guarantee of 100 days of employment to households willing to provide

unskilled labour. MGNREGA is the largest work guarantee programme in the world with the primary objective of guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment per year to rural households. The programme emphasizes on strengthening the process of decentralization by giving a significant role to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in planning and implementing these works. Nearly 40 million migrants have returned to villages, there is a significant increase in demand for MGNREGA during the COVID period (Dev, 2020). With this background, the present study was taken with the objective of “Assessment of Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Challenges among the beneficiaries in MGNREGA works in Tamil Nadu”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The massive numbers of works being undertaken in rural areas have the potential to not only transform the rural economy but also its environment. As quoted by the then Minister for Rural Development, “the Ministry of Rural Development’s (MoRD) Schemes have an immense potential to contribute to the goal of sustainable poverty reduction and efficient use of natural resources, including improved landuse planning and management practices” (Shah *et al.*, 2012). MGNREGA aids in enrichment of agriculture productivity through constructing water harvesting, check dams, ground water recharging, improve moisture content, check in soil erosion and micro-irrigation, stemming of distress migration, increased access to markets and services through rural connectivity works, supplementing household income, increase in women workforce participation ration, and the regeneration of natural resources (Shrirame, 2012). There is a gross mismatch between the needs of the community and the actual work undertaken, which is the major challenge faced by the MGNREGA in the states (Abdul Rahim, 2012). But there are some areas of

improvement *i.e.*, less contribution of women, no unemployment allowance for number of work days, incomplete target of 100 days employment and no skill work for further development of human resource (Sharma and Manoj 2012). His research, aims to test the challenges causing barriers in the accomplishment of the object of MGNREGA (Gupta, 2012). There is a need of development in identifying/creating new employment chances and dovetailing various programmers routed by the Central and the State Governments with NREGA (Chaarlas and Velmurugan, 2012). Public in adequate awareness, no purposive spending, being unorganized (Shenbagaraj and Arockiasamy, 2013). Poor allocation of funds and its disbursed to the beneficiaries affect its functioning also increased political interference in selection of beneficiaries and assigning of works (Thirumalkannan and Rajpravin 2020).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study Salem district were purposively selected. In this district Panamarathupatty block were selected with a sample size of 200 beneficiaries, the Probability sampling was used for the selection of villages. The beneficiaries were selected through simple random sampling method, from the selected five villages 40 beneficiaries were selected us comprise the sample size of 200 beneficiaries. In Salem district Panamarathupatty block were purposively selected and it consists of 20 villages from this five villages *viz.*, Kammalappatti, Kuralnatham, Nazhikkalpatti, Thumbalpatti and Vazhakkuttapatti were selected for the study. To get a comprehensive understanding, a personal interview method was employed to collect the required information for the study. The number of Beneficiaries for each of the selected village was selected by simple random sampling method. The village wise Beneficiaries’ details for the study were furnished in Table 1.

Table 1: Selection of study area and respondents.

District	Block	Villages	Sample
Salem	Panamarathupatty	Kammalappatti	40
		Kuralnatham	40
		Nazhikkalpatti	40
		Thumbalpatti	40
		Vazhakkuttapatti	40
Total			200

SWOC identified: One of the most effective methods of PRA *i.e.*, preferential ranking technique was used in this study for identifying the strength, weakness, opportunity and challenges faced by the beneficiaries in the MGNREGA works. In this regard, strength and opportunity had seven parameters, weakness and challenges had five parameters for the measurement of SWOC among the MGNREGA beneficiaries. The quantification of data was done by first ranking the strength, weakness, opportunity and challenges based

on the responses obtained from the beneficiaries and then calculating the Rank Based Quotient (RBQ) (Sabarathnam, 1988), which is as follows:

$$RBQ = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n fi(n+1-i)}{N \times n} \times 100$$

Where,

f_i = Frequency of beneficiaries for the i^{th} rank of SWOC parameters

N= number of beneficiaries

n= Number of ranks

$\sum_{i=1}^n$ = It directs to sum of the multiply factors

$\sum_{i=1}^n f_i(n+1-i) = f_1 \times n + f_2 \times n-1 + f_3 \times n-2 + \dots + f_n \times 1$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SWOC Analysis of MGNREGA

The strength, weakness, opportunities and challenges were identified among the MGNREGA beneficiaries.

Table 2: Strength.

Sr. No.	Parameter	Rank							RBQ	Rank
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1.	Guaranteed and on demand Work	77	33	37	19	34	0	0	78.57	VI
2.	Equity among men and women	101	78	11	10	0	0	0	90.71	II
3.	High Access of Marginalized Households to work	97	73	23	0	0	7	0	89.00	III
4.	Strengthened and Planned Administrative System	61	21	11	7	35	34	31	60.00	VII
5.	Panchayat Role as Stimulating factor for people participation	81	44	33	13	17	2	10	79.50	V
6.	Easy Payment mechanism by banks	121	32	45	2	0	0	0	90.86	I
7.	Transparency and Accountability	131	32	19	0	0	4	14	87.57	IV

Easy Payment mechanism by banks. The easy payment mechanism by banks was the first major strength with RBQ of 90.86, the direct transfer of wages to the beneficiaries' bank account reduces the complex mechanisms. This ensures the easy payment mechanisms, beneficiaries also getting the timely payments.

Equity among men and women. The equity among men and women was identified as the second major strength with RBQ of 90.71. The equal wages and assignment of same work for the men and women ensures the equity among them in the society.

High Access of Marginalized Households to work. The MGNREGS scheme has been designed and devised for implementation during the lean season of the year in rural areas without affecting the regular farm operations. This ensures the high Access of Marginalized Households to work, identified as the third major strength among beneficiaries with RBQ of 89.00.

Transparency and Accountability. Transparency and Accountability has been identified as the fourth major strength with RBQ of 87.00, the MGNREGA official's shares information with beneficiaries that is needed to

make informed decisions and hold officials accountable for the conduct of beneficiaries work.

Panchayat Role as Stimulating factor for people participation. Panchayat Role as Stimulating factor for people participation has been considered as the fifth strength with RBQ value of 79.50. The beneficiaries participating in gramasab has for discussing, planning of new projects and activities in the panchayat. In discussions and meetings, the panchayat official's acts as facilitators and beneficiaries also participate as an active participant in discussions.

Guaranteed and on demand Work. Guaranteed and on demand Work was identified as sixth strength among the beneficiaries with RBQ of 78.57. The main aim of the scheme is providing 100 days of employment to the beneficiaries in the year and this helps them to perform their livelihood activities in the non-agricultural seasons.

Strengthened and Planned Administrative System. Strengthened and Planned Administrative System was identified as seventh strength among the beneficiaries with RBQ of 60.00.

Table 3: Weakness.

Sr. No.	Parameter	Rank					RBQ	Rank
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Less interest on scheme due to higher wages in Urban Area	138	29	33	0	0	90.50	I
2.	Same wages irrespective of Age	127	23	11	13	26	81.20	II
3.	Poor Participation in Meetings	0	0	48	81	71	37.70	IV
4.	Complication in wage calculation	20	0	21	38	121	36.00	V
5.	Lack of planning and expertise in identifying development work	77	62	39	22	0	79.40	III

Less interest on scheme due to higher wages in Urban Area. Less interest on scheme due to higher wages in Urban Area were identified as the major weakness and ranked first among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 90.50. The study area is near to the semi-

urban regions, during seasonal times they are getting higher wages from the non-agricultural works. The higher wages in the urban area is one of the pull factors for the beneficiaries in attracting them and causes seasonal migration among them.

Same wages irrespective of Age. Same wages irrespective of Age was identified as the second most weakness among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 81.20. The beneficiaries in the study area feeling as one of the major weakness were the same wages for all age categories irrespective of their work efficiency.

Lack of planning and expertise in identifying development work. Lack of planning and expertise in identifying development work was identified as the weakness among beneficiaries with RBQ value of 79.40. In some certain, the worksite facilitators identifying the worksites which are far away from the village and less needed works are also they identifying. This might be the reason for the lack of planning and

lacks in identifying and prioritizing the needful development works in the panchayat.

Poor Participation in Meetings. Poor Participation in Meetings was identified as the weakness among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 37.70. The participation in meetings makes them to be part in planning process for discussing the development activities in the panchayat.

Complication in wage calculation. Complication in wage calculation was identified as one of the weakness among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 36.00. The work was measured in units, based on unit of the work done the wages are calculated. The complication in the wage calculation by the panchayat officials, makes the panchayat officials in delaying the payment.

Table 4: Opportunities.

Sr. No.	Parameter	Rank							RBQ	Rank
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1.	Empowerment of Society	102	34	32	19	0	13	0	84.29	II
2.	Check on Migration	72	23	32	21	36	0	16	72.14	VI
3.	More focus on Livelihood Facilities	89	33	22	19	23	14	0	78.86	III
4.	Creation of Assets	127	35	12	14	0	2	10	87.79	I
5.	Conversion of Unskilled into Skilled	69	0	0	6	34	45	46	53.21	VII
6.	Responsibility of Gram Panchayat in MGNREGA works	77	55	0	0	29	20	19	72.50	V
7.	Creates job opportunities for all stakeholders in their rural habitats	110	21	0	36	0	0	33	76.64	IV

Creation of Assets. Creation of Assets in the village panchayat was ranked first opportunity among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 87.79. The study area is nearer to the peri-urban regions, the development of the village is important, so there is more number of development opportunities in these areas.

Empowerment of Society. Empowerment of Society was identified as one of the major opportunity among the beneficiaries and ranked second opportunity with RBQ value of 84.29. The creation of assets in the village makes more employment opportunities and improves the labour market earnings among the labourers, which in turn empowers the society.

More focus on Livelihood Facilities. More focus on Livelihood Facilities was identified as third important opportunity among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 78.86. The study area is nearer to the peri-urban regions, the development of these areas is important for the society. So the creation of assets and development works are important to increase the livelihood activities among the beneficiaries.

Creates job opportunities for all stakeholders in their rural habitats. Creates job opportunities for all stakeholders in their rural habitats were identified as a one of the major opportunity among the beneficiaries with RBQ of 76.64. The creation of assets makes more employment opportunities in the village.

Responsibility of Gram Panchayat in MGNREGA works. Responsibility of Gram Panchayat in MGNREGA works were identified as the opportunity among the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 72.50. There is an opportunities for the grama panchayat to look down the developments works, which is to support for the developments in the peri-urban regions.

Check on Migration. Check on Migration was identified as an opportunity with RBQ value of 72.14, the MGNREGA provides 100 days of employment opportunities in a year. This helps the agricultural labourers to work in the non-agricultural seasons also, this reduces the seasonal migration among the labourers in the villages. The results were in line with the findings of Adeppa (2014).

Table 5: Challenges.

Sr. No.	Parameter	Rank					RBQ	Rank
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Lack of awareness regarding Scheme	0	0	18	85	97	32.10	V
2.	Overburden for gram panchayat	55	54	63	28	0	73.60	II
3.	Increased political interference in selection of beneficiaries and assigning of works	78	34	29	59	0	73.10	III
4.	Lack of monitoring skills by worksite facilitators	98	69	33	0	0	86.50	I
5.	Incomplete vigilance and monitoring Committees	7	66	73	33	21	60.50	IV

Conversion of Unskilled into Skilled. Conversion of Unskilled into Skilled was identified as a one of the opportunity with RBQ value of 53.21. The land development works in the MGNREGA, makes the labourers into more skilled. It creates an opportunity among the beneficiaries to learn and work all types of agricultural works.

Lack of monitoring skills by worksite facilitators. Lack of monitoring skills by worksite facilitators as the major challenge identified from the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 86.50, there is no separate worksite facilitators for the MGNREGA works in the panchayat. The panchayat is giving the worksite facilitator role to the one of the beneficiary and they act as the role of worksite facilitator.

Overburden for gram panchayat. Overburden for gram panchayat was identified as one of the challenge from the beneficiaries with RBQ value of 73.60. The complication in the wage calculation and maintenance of NMR register has overburden among the panchayat officials, in addition to the development works in panchayat.

Increased political interference in selection of beneficiaries and assigning of works. Increased political interference in selection of beneficiaries and assigning of works was identified as one of the challenge with RBQ value of 73.10. The assigning of works is made by the panchayat officials, the biasness in assigning the works among the beneficiaries forms some negative impressions among the panchayat officials. The results are in line with the findings of Thirumalkannan and Rajpravin 2020).

Incomplete vigilance and monitoring Committees. Incomplete vigilance and monitoring Committees was identified as the challenge among beneficiaries with RBQ value of 60.50. The improper monitoring in the MGNREGA, results in poor completion of the works. This shows that the continuous monitoring they needed, to perform the works in effective manner.

Lack of awareness regarding Scheme. Lack of awareness Regarding Scheme was identified as a least challenge among the beneficiaries with RBQ of 32.10. The labourers in the study area were mostly illiterate to neo-literates, they are lacking in accessing the information. This might be the reason for the lack of awareness regarding the scheme, the participation of labourers in the panchayat meetings makes them to more accessible towards the information's of MGNREGA.

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that beneficiaries facing the array of challenges, in order to take the advantage of promising opportunities on MGNREGA works makes

the beneficiaries to work effectively. The beneficiaries participating in gramasabhas for discussing, planning of new projects and activities in the panchayat. In discussions and meetings, the panchayat official's acts as facilitators and beneficiaries also participate as an active participant in discussions. The main aim of the scheme is providing 100 days of employment to the beneficiaries in the year and this helps them to perform their livelihood activities in the non-agricultural seasons. The equal wages and assignment of same work for the men and women ensures the equity among them in the society. The creation of assets in the village makes more employment opportunities and improves the labour market earnings among the labourers, which in turn empowers the society.

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