

A Brief Report on- Two Days National Symposium- MNREGA: Interrogative Development Perspective in India

Date: 10 & 11 Aug-2015

Venue: K.N. Udapa Auditorium, IMS, BHU, Varanasi]

Background Note: Gramya Sansthan is one of the partner organizations of PACS in district Varanasi-U.P. MNREGA is one of the major themes taken under the implemented project by the support of PACS for empowering the targeted socially excluded communities and further maximizing scope of MNREGA in terms of creating jobs, raising awareness level in common masses through various ways, sensitizing village institutions i.e. Gram Panchayats & govt. functionaries and motivating the rural people to ensure their active participation in the planning and monitoring process of MNREGA to avail rural based employment to cater their livelihood needs.

Keeping in view of the above, a ‘**Two Days National Symposium on MNREGA: Interrogative Development Perspective in India**’ was organized by **Gramya Sansthan** as local partner of **PACS** itself in collaboration with Department of Sociology, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi and some other Civil Society Organizations i.e. International Goodwill Society, Swami Param Welfare Society. It was hosted by Department of Sociology, BHU. PACS supported to the great deal in organizing the symposium.

The symposium was graced with many distinguished professors from reputed universities i.e. JNU, New Delhi, AMU, Aligarh, Ambedkar University, Lucknow, and BHU, Varanasi itself. Professors and scholars were also being invited from some premier institutes i.e. G.B. Pant, Allahabad along with some social activists, NGOs functionaries and their personnel for this mega event. A galaxy of thoughts and gracious presence of distinguished guests made the symposium memorable one.

Multiplicity of thoughts and views were expressed by the invited distinguished guests and speakers on the occasion that reflected different perspectives of MNREGA. A mixed opinion was acknowledged with regard to the interrogative development perspective in India.

The programme begins with mark of inaugural ceremony in traditional way where Hon’ble Vice-Chancellor of BHU, **Prof. G.C. Tripathi** was invited as the Chief Guest. He lightens the lamp and offered a garland of flower on the statue of Late Sri. Malviya Ji placed on the Dias of Auditorium. Some guest of honor named Prof. S.R. Yadav, Head of Department, Sociology, BHU, Prof. R.R. Jha, Dean, BHU, Prof. Ashok Pankaj, Council for Social Development, New Delhi and Smt. Rekha Srivastava, Lokpal, MNREGA, Varanasi also accompanied.

A group song by the performing artists was sung from the faculty of BHU that signifies the importance and glory of Varanasi City known for its ancient heritage, rich culture, peace & harmony, profound wisdom, capital of education and spirituality all over the world. Now respected guest of honor on the Dias were honored by presenting them bookey and Memento.

The programme was divided in different sessions for each of the day. Prof. S.R. Yadav, welcomed to all the distinguished guests, speakers, partners organizations and participants. The convener of symposium was Prof. A.K. Pandey who also facilitated it with Dr. Sharad.

Prof. G.C. Tripathi, the Vice Chancellor, BHU and Chief Guest, in his brief speech said that "*Development in India has always been Growth with Social Justice*". He emphasized on the equal participation of women.

After this, one by one distinguished guests & speakers including Dr. Anil Singh, Prof. R.R. Jha-Dean, BHU, Prof. Ashok Pankaj, JNU-New Delhi, Smt. Rekha Srivastava, Lokpal, MNREGA, Varanasi expressed their views and opinion. By this, a brief overview on MNREGA was shared by Prof. Ashok Pankaj who delivered a keynote address and further laid down a foundation for next sessions. MNREGA uniqueness, salient features of MNREGA, its contribution in rural base employment, village development process, its shortcoming, loopholes, impacts over the rural & marginalized community, women empowerment, access of benefit to SCs & STs proportion, field learning & challenges and some suggestions were taken during the discussion.

The next session was **Plenary Session on MNREGA and Inclusive Development** in which following guests were called upon the Dias namely, Prof. Himanshu Shekha Jha, Chairperson, Mr. Prashant Kumar Anchal, Discussant and State Manager-PACS, and in Speaker, Prof. N.K. Mishra, Prof. Manish Verma, Prof. B.N. Prasad, Dr. Anita Nuna and Dr. Anita Sharma expressed their views & opinion on the topic.

In this session, meaning and definitions of inclusive growth and inclusive development were shared by each guests & speakers. It was told that MNREGA has been one of the ambitious employment schemes implemented in India and World ever with some remarkable achievements in different aspects e.g. setting up minimum wages, right based, demand driven, asset creation, rural employment and development of productive means over a period of time. In this context, some reference of MNREGA journey as employment guarantee Act was given.

Mr. Prashant also updated some new information e.g. IPPE blocks, Non-IPPE blocks, recently updated web portal of MNREGA to have access of all sorts of data in a click. Overall, it was found that despite having some malfunctioning and corruption at several levels, MNREGA has been successful in its objectives to avail right based rural employment and creation of productive assets in village development process. By the time improvements are taking place.

At the end of the each session, mementos were presented to the guests as gesture of honor.

The next session was on **MNREGA and Agriculture Development**: in which following guests were invited on the Dias: Prof. E. Haq, Chairperson, Prof. A.K. Kaul, Discussant and in speakers Prof. Rakesh Singh, Prof. B.K. Chaudhari, Prof. Abdul Matin and Dr. (Ms.) Bina Prasad. This session was mainly focused on the critical examination of MNREGA. Further, impact of MNREGA on agriculture was analyzed that due to push effect of MNREGA, cost of agri-production is getting high and income is getting down.

Farmer's especially marginal farmers commit suicide due to post production loss. It was also focused that village economic activities e.g. rope making, basket making, pottery work etc. are getting down and being replaced with new ready products of the market that is called 'Internal Colonization'. MNREGA has little scope in agriculture as it cover only water & soil conservation. However it was also pointed out that MNREGA and Agriculture are co-related. Allied activities in agriculture are growing like vegetables, fruits, dairy, fishery etc. and decline in cereals products. Contextualization of MNREGA is need of hour. Some field study conducted in different regions i.e. Kerala, Meghalaya states in India to widen the scope of MNREGA and to address local need of the people. Women empowerment through

MNREGA and applying modern technologies to make it more transparent was part of the discussions.

Thus, the first day session comes to an end, Memento was presented to the respective guest at the end of the sessions as gesture of honor to them with an invitation to all the participants for next day sessions in Symposium.

The next session begins with **MNREGA and Democratic Decentralization** in which, Prof. P.N. Pandey, Prof. B.K. Nagla, Prof. J.K. Tiwari, Dr. Vishwanath Pandey, Prof. Pradeep Bhargawa and Prof. Deepayan were the guests on the Dias.

In this session, some previous employment and rural development schemes like IRDP, JRY were pointed out and later on MNREGA emergence. Despite having all sorts of economical growth, welfare feeling and approach towards the poor people welfare cannot be ruled out especially in context of MNREGA. Again some of the key features were again pointed out. MNREGA has always been criticizing by the policy makers, planning commission, economists etc. There are supporters as well as opposite of MNREGA among them. The logic in support is given that fund allocation under MNREGA is less than one percent of total GDP while advantage are many. In this way, MNREGA support to avail job to ensure their food security. It included all poorest of poor in its priority to come together and ask work in right based manner. Yes, there is need to strengthen the democratic decentralization by the help of building capacities of local institutions e.g. Panchayats and raising govt. accountability on it.

The next session was on **Interface between NGOs, Bureaucracy, Media and Academics:** In this session Prof. Abdul Matin, Prof. Ashok Pankaj, Ms. Bindu Singh-Gramya Sansthan invited as guest of honor on the Dias. It was also announced by Prof. Pankaj that it will be an Open Session where opinions will be taken by the other participants as well. It was discussed that there are many factors in implementation of MNREGA i.e. Policy makers, Bureaucrats, Academicians, NGOs and Media. It was again emphasized that rumors and wrong information among common people about MNREGA is hampering to it. We need to strengthen right flow of information by various ways and strengthening village institution e.g. Panchyats on this issue is necessary because the problem is at institution level by and large. Bindu ji also shared her field experiences of experiments on Laboure Budget, IPPE and shared some previous struggle of NGOs in Implementing MNREGA, its positive and key issues related to be addressed.

Meanwhile, **Mr. Viahakh Ji,-CDO** also joins the programme and come across the discussed points on MNREGA. He also clarifies on the key issues and problems e.g. late payments, data base information, fake muster role, rumors over MNREGA that was very informative to all.

In Valedictory Session, **Prof. A.K. Pandey** summarizes all the views and discussed points in two days of the symposium. Vote of thanks was given by **Mr. Anil Pandey**, from IGSI, Varanasi Chapter to all the distinguished guests, speakers, organizers, PACS, Gramya, Auditorium staff, BHU, Faculty members and other participants from Civil Society Organizations.

Thanks

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