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Deepak, Shah

Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics

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Implementation of NREGA in Maharashtra: Experiences, Challenges and Ways Forward

Deepak Shah*

Introduction

One of the major planks of rapid poverty reduction in the Eleventh Five Year Plan is the successful implementation of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) in majority of the states of India. The Act, passed by the Parliament in August 2005, is a path-breaking legislation as it guarantees wage employment on public works to any adult who is willing to do unskilled manual work for 100 days in a year at minimum wages as prescribed in the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The NREGA is different from other wage employment guarantee programmes as it makes employment a right for the people and in the case of failure to provide employment, the state government is liable to pay an unemployment allowance, equivalent to one third or half of the minimum wage. Although NREGA is an innovative piece of legislation that has no parallel anywhere in the world, one of the major concerns relates to whether guaranteeing employment is a way to alleviate poverty. The experience of Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in Maharashtra, which came into being in 1965 as a pilot project in *Tasgaon* village in Sangli district, reveals that though poverty rates may not have fallen, the scheme does provide some security to poor households. In fact, Maharashtra seems to be the only state that was successful in preventing an increase in any of the poverty measures during the 1987-88 draught. Further, studies have shown that while head-count ratio (HCR) of poverty may not have gone down significantly, there is a considerable effect on the severity of poverty since EGS wages augment the income of the poor¹ (Khera, 2005).

The significance of NREGA lies in the fact that it creates a right based framework for wage employment programme and makes the government legally bound to extend employment to those who demand it. While the Act provides a legal framework, the state governments have the legal liability and the central government provides the fiscal guarantee. The Act ensures that there is decentralized planning, which means a perspective plan needs to be prepared for whole district with a list of permissible works.² In this way the legislation goes beyond providing a social safety net, and towards guaranteeing the right to employment. There has been a spate of studies designed to assess the performance of National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) ever since the Act relating to it came into being (Dreze and Khera, 2009, Mehrotra, 2008, Ambastha et al. 2008, Gopal, 2009, Jha et al. 2008, Jha, Bhattacharya, Gaiha, Shankar, 2009, Jha, et al., 2009a, and Scandizzo et al. 2009). While some studies have drawn attention to huge leakage and fudging of muster rolls, others are not that critical and have been ecstatic over the number of jobs created,

* Faculty Member and Research Scholar, respectively, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics (Deemed to be University), Deccan Gymkhana, Pune – 411004 (Maharashtra), India

and number of beneficiaries from disadvantaged groups such as the Scheduled Tribes (ST), Scheduled Castes (SC) and women (Gaiha et.al. 2009). This is symptomatic of the fact that while some studies have debunked this nation-wide programme, others are seen to endorse it on the grounds that it will transform the lives of poor and make them aware of their entitlement. In the light of this backdrop, this study attempts to investigate the implementation of NREGA in the state of Maharashtra with emphasis on coverage of households, employment guaranteed, works undertaken, strengths, bottlenecks and strategies for further strengthening the programme.

Potential Benefits of NREGA

Workfare programmes not only typically provide unskilled workers with short-term employment on public works but also income transfers to poor households during periods when they suffer on account of absence of opportunities of employment. In areas with high unemployment rates and under employment, transfer benefits from workfare programmes can prevent poverty from worsening, especially during lean periods. As requisite infrastructure is created, the durable assets created by these programmes have the potential to generate second-round employment benefits. In broader sense, the NREGA will help the government in: (a) overcoming growing stockpiles of foodgrains, (b) ensuring water security and market connectivity, (c) preventing rural-urban migration, and (d) development of human capital.

Since the Government of India holds foodgrains far in excess of the quantity required to achieve food security, the NREGA offers the Government the opportunity to use this excess of grains to finance labour for the development of rural infrastructure. Utilisation of excess grains to finance the scheme will serve two purposes: (i) paying a part of the wages in term of grain will avoid the inflationary tendency in other wage goods that may arise due a sudden transfer of purchasing power, and (ii) it will reduce the outlay on food subsidy by significantly reducing the carrying cost of grain. The NREGA will provide the Government with a means to reduce expenditure on the current account and improve the fiscal health of the Government.

The rural India is facing an increasing problem of water security due to lack of irrigation infrastructure. Water tables all over the country have been falling due to over-exploitation of ground water resources. It is believed that the NREGA offers a 'historic opportunity' to address this problem (Shah, 2007). The expenditure on public works under the NREGA can be directed towards construction of irrigation apparatus, which would alleviate the problem of water security to some extent. The funds allocated under the NREGA may be used for development of roads thereby connecting villages to national highways and thus facilitating connectivity with markets.

The NREGA will have significant positive impact on seasonal rural-urban migrations by providing employment to rural workers during the lean season. This will reduce the problems of excessive population pressures in Indian cities as surplus rural labour will find employment in their own districts. The NREGA may also have an impact on permanent migrations trends. Though it is difficult to ascertain the impact, one can assume that the created infrastructure and

the increased activity in the rural economy due to increased purchasing power will lead to higher rates of permanent job creation, thereby mitigating the urgency to migrate. Further, the public works have the potential to develop human capital by promoting skills in rural India. This may be through 'learning-by-doing' kind of processes or through formal training of the workers by trained personnel. This shall reduce the dependence of the rural population on agriculture by enabling them to move on to other activities. Thus, NREGA has several potential benefits of reviving the economy as it is self targeting, self adjusting and self liquidating.

NREGA Implementation in Maharashtra

Government intervention is necessary in the form of public work programmes to mitigate poverty, unemployment and hunger. Those working under NREGA, spend the additional money to create demand for other commodities. The extra income so generated creates further demand and this process is called the multiplier. The value of the multiplier depends on the marginal propensity to consume (MPC). The higher the MPC, greater is the propensity to consume and NREGA provides money in the hands of the people who have the highest MPC. NREGA workers not only stimulate demand, they also produce. They also include many small and marginal farmers who work under NREGA because the productivity of their own farms is no longer enough to make ends meet. NREGA will become really powerful when it helps rebuild this decimated productivity of small farms. Public investment incentivises private investment through small farmers and gives them a chance to return to farming. Since EGS in Maharashtra was a role model based on which NREGA came into being, it would be interesting to know how well NREGA has done in the state from where it has originated.

Though the Act came into force in February 2006 in 200 most backward districts of the country, it was subsequently extended to cover all the 615 districts of India. In the state of Maharashtra, various districts came under the purview of NREGA in three different phases, which were decided after conducting a backwardness index.³ The index took into account low productivity, low wages and proportion of SC and ST.

Job Card Issued

The job card is free of cost and need to be issued by the Gram Panchayat within 15 days after receiving an application, and employment is given within 15 days of issuance of job card, failing which unemployment allowance has to be paid as per the norms prescribed in NREGA. The job card ensures that labourers are in possession of a written record of the number of days they have worked, wages paid, unemployment allowances received, etc. Details regarding percentage of job card issued to total number of persons registered under NREGA in Maharashtra are given in Table 1. The figures provided in Table 1 clearly underscore the fact that there has been wide variation in the proportion of job cards issued to number of households registered under NREGA across various districts of Maharashtra.

Table 1: Job Cards Issued to Total Number of Persons Registered Under NREGA in Maharashtra
(in per cent)

Regions/Districts	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Konkan				
Thane	37.00	36.5	36.5	36.59
Raigad	29.86	32.11	31.98	30.94
Ratnagiri	6.97	7.23	7.23	7.23
Sindhudurg	1.26	19.53	19.36	19.36
Nashik				
Nashik	-	-	-	-
Dhule	36.42	36.47	36.47	36.47
Nandurbar	37.81	37.83	37.83	37.83
Jalgaon	50.26	40.83	40.83	40.83
Pune				
Pune	3.84	3.99	3.99	3.99
Satara	47.88	47.38	47.38	47.38
Sangli	8.651	8.27	8.27	8.27
Solapur	16.21	45.24	45.24	45.24
Kolhapur	55.29	51.38	51.38	51.38
Aurangabad				
Aurangabad	39.91	40.20	40.20	40.20
Jalna	36.11	35.85	35.85	35.85
Parbhani	39.43	39.05	39.05	39.05
Hingoli	37.97	38.07	38.07	38.07
Beed	38.34	38.22	38.22	38.22
Nanded	38.13	38.02	38.02	38.02
Osmanabad	34.33	39.96	39.96	39.96
Latur	37.02	36.80	36.80	36.80
Amravati				
Amravati	42.48	42.62	42.62	42.62
Washim	33.65	37.18	37.18	37.18
Yavatmal	39.28	40.92	40.92	40.92
Akola	41.37	41.37	41.37	41.37
Buldhana	38.19	38.36	38.36	38.36
Nagpur				
Nagpur	-	0.07	0.075	0.07
Wardha	36.83	37.85	37.85	37.85
Bhandara	39.74	38.52	38.52	38.52
Gondia	40.59	39.83	39.83	39.83
Gadchiroli	34.42	34.36	34.36	34.36
Chandrapur	39.85	39.67	39.67	39.67
Maharashtra State	32.29	33.8	33.8	33.8

The general scenario shows that only 34 per cent households registered under NREGA received job cards in Maharashtra, which is quite a low proportion. It was only in the case of Kolhapur that this proportion was 50-55 per cent during the period between 2006-07 and 2009-10. The proportion of job cards issued to number of households registered under NREGA was relatively high in districts belonging to Aurangabad, Amravati and Nagpur regions where this proportion stood at 35-50 per cent. The districts like Ratnagiri, Pune, Sangli and Nagpur showed very low proportion in this respect. The plausible reasons for the low percentage of issue of job cards could be: (a) lack of awareness among people about the programme and registration process, (b) lack of door to door survey to register persons, (c) discrimination based on caste,

community, and also proximity to Sarpanch, (d) job cards taken back by the Sarpanch on the grounds of non-attachment of photograph, (e) lack of maintenance of records of the people who have migrated to other places, (f) undue charges for the photograph despite free delivery of job cards, etc. Other problems relate to delay in issue of job cards, improper entries in job cards, inflation of number of working days, illiteracy of people, etc., which ultimately defeat the implementation of NREGA in the right perspective.

Distribution of Job Cards to Weaker Sections

Though the programme does not confine to any particular group, it is ensured that the most of the SC and ST families willing to do unskilled manual work get preference. However, observations show that only 10-11 percent of households belonging to SC and ST category received job cards as against 75-78 per cent for other categories (Table 2). It was only in the case of the district of Hingoli that job cards were evenly distributed among SC, ST and other categories. The districts like Thane, Nandurbar, and Gadchiroli sowed significantly high proportion of job cards issued to ST category.

Table 2: Share of SC, ST and Other Category in Job Card Issued under NREGA in Maharashtra

Districts	2006-07			2009-10		
	SC	ST	Others	SC	ST	Others
Thane	2.42	69.95	27.63	2.42	69.95	27.63
Raigad	4.61	16.19	79.2	4.81	16.83	78.36
Ratnagiri	3.86	0.46	95.68	3.76	0.44	95.8
Sindhudurg	13.33	0	86.67	9.56	0.57	89.87
Dhule	2.83	10.3	86.87	2.83	10.29	86.88
Nandurbar	4.35	82.43	13.22	4.42	82.3	13.28
Jalgaon	18.9	19.82	61.28	16.81	19.19	64
Pune	7.63	6.11	86.26	6.55	5.22	88.23
Satara	8.95	1.02	90.03	8.95	1.02	90.03
Sangli	21.25	0.18	78.57	21.25	0.18	78.57
Solapur	14.67	2.42	82.91	12.77	2.39	84.84
Kolhapur	10.64	0.2	89.16	9.76	0.15	90.09
Aurangabad	10.56	0.19	89.25	9.8	0.15	90.05
Jalna	0.05	0.02	99.93	0.05	0.02	99.93
Parbhani	3.2	0.15	96.65	3.2	0.15	96.65
Hingoli	34.49	32.39	33.12	33.86	31.78	34.36
Beed	0.05	0.02	99.93	0.06	0.02	99.92
Nanded	14.26	9.01	76.73	14.21	8.98	76.81
Osmanabad	17.9	0.98	81.12	17.68	0.9	81.42
Latur	31.04	1.89	67.07	30.8	1.88	67.32
Amravati	3.39	1.84	94.77	3.35	1.83	94.82
Washim	17.64	6.54	75.82	17.11	6.36	76.53
Yavatmal	10.59	20.12	69.29	10.54	19.56	69.9
Akola	16.02	4.77	79.21	16.02	4.77	79.21
Buldhana	7.04	0.89	92.07	6.97	0.89	92.14
Nagpur	-	-	-	6.45	2.15	91.4
Wardha	6.03	5.1	88.87	5.83	4.93	89.24
Bhandara	4.37	1.33	94.3	4.37	1.32	94.31
Gondia	2.65	2.12	95.23	2.66	2.18	95.16
Gadchiroli	13.83	36.37	49.8	13.82	36.37	49.81
Chandrapur	6.51	9.28	84.21	6.84	10.31	82.85
Maharashtra State	9.78	12.06	78.16	9.92	10.72	79.36

Most of the districts showing higher percentage of job cards issued to ST are tribal dominated. Since 54 per cent of ST population of Maharashtra is confined to districts like Thane, Nashik, Nagpur, Dhule, Nandurbar and Yavatmal, the job cards issued to this category stands higher in Thane and Nandurbar. On the other hand, Latur has the highest proportion of SC population in the state, followed by Bhandara. The proportion of SC workers being issued job cards therefore stands higher than ST in the district of Latur.

Employment Generation

The objective of the NREGA is to enhance the livelihood security of the people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to a rural household whose members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The Act further aims at creating durable assets and strengthening the livelihood resource base of the rural poor. The choice of works suggested in the Act address causes of chronic poverty like drought, deforestation, soil erosion, etc., so that the process of employment generation is on a sustainable basis. However, despite making provision of 100 days of employment in a year, it is often seen that there has been wide deviation in terms of actual employment generation. For instance, the actual employment generation is much below than 100 days in a year in almost all the districts of Maharashtra with the exception of districts like Thane and Nandurbar (Table 3).

Table 3: Employment Generation under NREGA in Maharashtra

Districts	Total Mandays Generated (in Lakhs)				Average Mandays per Household per Year			
	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Thane	-	14.96	66.82	4.60	-	36.84	102.58	20.98
Raigad	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.89	5.16
Dhule	2.16	3.34	7.28	3.03	11.24	41.96	50.15	60.74
Nandurbar	7.87	11.80	57.77	17.06	110.06	37.45	104.44	46.26
Jalgaon	-	-	0.79	0.22	-	-	21.60	14.30
Pune	-	-	0.03	-	-	-	11.65	0.00
Satara	-	-	0.05	-	-	-	22.56	0.00
Sangli	-	-	0.28	0.02	-	-	16.50	30.95
Solapur	-	-	0.17	0.11	-	-	15.21	25.89
Kolhapur	-	-	0.02	-	-	-	-	-
Aurangabad	0.94	5.01	12.65	11.39	19.33	34.95	39.52	59.55
Jalna	-	-	1.93	0.32	-	-	24.74	11.28
Parbhani	-	-	5.56	1.55	-	-	44.78	12.49
Hingoli	0.03	11.39	27.71	5.17	30.82	47.10	6.94	37.34
Beed	-	-	1.29	0.76	-	-	39.41	43.05
Nanded	0.57	10.24	17.80	14.18	12.41	34.20	42.75	50.97
Osmanabad	-	0.50	3.59	1.72	-	34.93	32.93	46.15
Latur	-	0.00	10.81	6.64	-	-	47.13	58.60
Amravati	3.04	10.82	12.81	4.46	28.23	34.90	37.57	26.78
Washim	-	0.36	1.18	0.33	0.00	25.63	28.27	26.90
Yavatmal	0.05	2.72	10.94	4.35	8.82	31.00	44.72	92.16
Akola	-	0.54	1.21	0.14	-	25.94	33.56	36.68
Buldhana	-	0.76	5.70	2.36	-	25.88	27.58	29.33
Nagpur	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12.00
Wardha	-	0.69	0.84	0.91	-	17.35	16.93	33.08
Bhandara	-	13.07	24.30	11.77	-	25.53	31.35	27.01
Gondia	0.58	18.00	34.54	7.44	4.68	28.81	36.87	25.56
Gadchiroli	2.24	13.22	20.09	7.17	19.44	31.73	36.34	3.18
Chandrapur	2.52	5.10	3.68	3.29	19.78	20.42	13.29	23.17
Maharashtra State	20.00	122.52	329.84	108.99	22.06	29.70	28.40	26.04

Among various districts, Nandurbar invariably showed significantly higher mandays generated under NREGA during the entire period between 2006-07 and 2009-10. Nandurbar is one of the most backward districts in the state. The average per household employment generation in Nandurbar district was found to be more than 100 days during 2006-07 and 2008-09. Like Nandurbar, the district of Thane also showed higher employment generation, especially during 2008-09 when the average employment generation per household stood at more than 100 days. The districts belonging to Nagpur and Nashik regions did not show any employment generation during 2006-07 as the programme was in its first phase and yet to be implemented in these districts. The highest employment generation under NREGA was noticed to be during 2008-09 when majority of backward districts showed about 40-50 mandays of employment generation per household. The impact of NREGA in terms of employment generation was not seen to be significant in forward districts of Maharashtra like Nashik, Pune, Kolhapur and Nagpur. However, in Aurangabad district, the average per household employment generation was found to be as high as 60 days during 2009-10. In general, the state of Maharashtra has shown very poor performance in terms per household employment generation, which remained well below 30 days all through the period between 2006-07 and 2009-10. This is an indication of the fact that employment generation under NREGA in Maharashtra is so far not very successful and it has to do a lot of catching to make its presence felt in the rural Maharashtra.

Wage Payment under NREGA

Under NREGA, while the central government bears the entire cost of wages of unskilled manual workers, 75 per cent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi skilled workers, administrative expenses as may be determined by the Central Government, which will include, inter alia, the salary and the allowances of the Programme Officer and his supporting staff and work site facilities, and expenses of the National Employment Guarantee Council, the state Governments have to bear the costs on some other items like 25 per cent of the cost of material, wages of skilled and semi skilled workers, unemployment allowance payable in case the State Government cannot provide wage employment on time, and administrative expenses of the State Employment Guarantee Council. Further, the legal guarantee of the Act mandates that wages due to workers be paid within 15 days of work completion. This requires that a fair record be maintained for the work done. In order to ensure that authentic muster rolls are used, numbered muster rolls are to be issued for each sanctioned work. The wage payment to workers is in accordance with the provisions made under NREGA. However, the wages offered under the scheme are sometimes below the minimum prescribed norms. In the state of Maharashtra, the wages offered under NREGA range from as low as Rs. 47 to Rs. 130 across various districts during the period between 2006-07 and 2009-10 (Table 4). However, the average per day wage rates are seen to be increasing in the state during this period despite the fact that some of the districts offered very low wages under the scheme.

Table 4: Average Per Day Wages Offered under NREGA in Maharashtra (in ruppees)

District	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Thane	-	123.93	108.76	100.8
Raigad	-	-	88.67	81.66
Dhule	65.8	87.87	93	122.87
Nandurbar	65.28	73.11	75.88	77.6
Jalgaon	-	-	115.23	88.35
Pune	-	-	60.3	-
Satara	-	-	69.76	-
Sangli	-	-	56.21	59.29
Solapur	-	-	58.67	82.13
Kolhapur	-	-	64.99	-
Aurangabad	65.36	79.37	91.54	115.62
Jalna	-	-	80.33	85.26
Parbhani	-	-	99.07	103.47
Hingoli	46.01	101	108.13	126
Beed	-	-	86.36	85
Nanded	64.35	87.3	111.69	130.52
Osmanabad	-	-	84.25	96.11
Latur	-	-	93.15	99.53
Amravati	61.9	80.92	84.91	101.53
Washim	-	94.42	89.46	101.27
Yavatmal	64.41	111.42	110.3	106.61
Akola	-	78.52	75.77	76.71
Buldhana	-	84.55	131.44	177.43
Nagpur	-	-	-	116
Wardha	-	69.9	93.03	105.8
Bhandara	47	52.61	58.08	56.6
Gondia	56.69	59.2	62.32	67.03
Gadchiroli	93.88	92.85	97.08	101
Chandrapur	58.07	60.95	72.84	78.41
Maharashtra State	57.3	74.3	75.66	79.45

Though wages offered under the scheme were higher than existing agricultural wages, several districts of the state offered wages below par than the prescribed wages under NREGA. For instance, wages offered in Bhandara were less than Rs.60 per day. Sangli district also showed lower wages on offer. However, an increasing trend was noticed in terms of wages offered under NREGA across various district of Maharashtra. There could several reasons for lower wages on offer. The improper methods of measurement of productivity led to low wages on offer. Lack of information to the workers about wage rates for different kinds of work in different types of terrain, lack of bargaining power of workers, fudging of muster rolls leading to low wage payment, difficulty in understanding the mode of payment-mix of cash and kind as prescribed in Maharashtra, etc. were some other problems relating to wages offered under NREAGA in the state of Maharashtra.

Type of Work Undertaken

The works undertaken under NREGA in Maharashtra were mainly relating to rural irrigation, water conservation and harvesting, draught proofing, land development and water

bodies. The estimates relating to different works undertaken under NREGA across various districts of Maharashtra for the year 2008-09 are provided in Table 5. Since during 2006-07 and 2007-08, the NREGA was in implementation phase in several districts of Maharashtra, the estimates relating to works undertaken under the scheme for these years are not shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Works Undertaken under NREGA in Maharashtra: 2008-09

Districts	Total Works	Share (%)								
		RI	FC	WCH	DP	MI	ILD	WB	LD	Others
Thane	6723	0.03	-	27.38	0.18	-	-	34.06	38.35	-
Raigad	1360	11.99	-	59.63	16.84	-	0.07	8.68	2.79	-
Ratnagiri	16	12.5	-	87.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sindhudurg	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nashik	114	0.88	-	92.98	0.88	-	0.88	-	2.63	1.75
Dhule	1336	18.26	-	58.83	1.88	-	-	5.91	-	15.12
Nandurbar	3637	15.23	0.41	15.23	5.95	0.03	-	60.21	-	2.94
Jalgaon	2080	20.19	-	34.23	31.1	-	-	14.38	0.1	-
Pune	54	7.41	1.85	66.67	-	-	-	-	24.07	-
Satara	259	-	-	78.76	-	-	-	-	21.24	-
Sangli	1092	38.64	-	39.29	8.61	-	-	9.98	1.65	1.83
Solapur	1977	19.68	-	67.07	1.01	-	0.05	2.83	4.05	5.31
Kolhapur	190	21.05	-	73.68	-	-	-	0.53	0.53	4.21
Aurangabad	7338	0.29	0.03	81.08	1.61	0.05	2.32	14.58	0.04	-
Jalna	1364	-	-	92.74	7.19	-	-	-	-	0.07
Parbhani	1208	0.66	-	99.01	0.33	-	-	-	-	-
Hingoli	7074	0.03	-	81.69	2.27	-	-	12.65	0.01	3.35
Beed	937	1.17	-	97.33	1.39	-	0.11	-	-	-
Nanded	9195	-	0.24	17.14	10.59	0.02	0.16	66.16	5.55	0.14
Osmanabad	3242	1.57	0.03	75.14	22.49	-	-	0.77	-	-
Latur	1516	1.65	6.4	80.21	0.07	-	-	5.08	3.03	3.56
Amravati	11032	10.79	0.05	61.87	7.95	2.26	2.42	1.52	0.34	12.8
Washim	1771	3.11	-	36.48	42.18	3.16	1.69	8.92	2.43	2.03
Yavatmal	4456	5.34	0.81	18.38	32.21	0.22	0.02	32.94	0.74	9.34
Akola	2253	0.31	-	18.29	79.81	-	0.04	0.13	0.8	0.62
Buldhana	5238	7.33	-	13.1	76.63	-	-	0.02	1.53	1.39
Nagpur	42	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-
Wardha	528	-	-	-	85.23	11.74	0.19	2.84	-	-
Bhandara	1665	53.27	-	22.22	1.57	2.04	0.12	16.82	1.26	2.7
Gondia	4110	44.31	0.07	25.11	6.59	0.1	0.07	21.75	0.61	1.39
Gadchiroli	3005	22.73	0.07	34.04	10.24	-	11.65	16.87	4.33	0.07
Chandrapur	4389	3.26	0.07	2.57	20.44	0.27	-	71.36	0.23	1.8
Maharashtra	89205	13.17	0.31	48.67	18.01	0.62	0.61	12.78	3.63	2.2

Note: RI = Rural Irrigation; FC = Flood Control; WCH = Water Conservation and Harvesting; DP = Draught Proofing; MI = Micro Irrigation; ILD = Irrigation Facility to Land Development; WB = Water Bodies (renovation of water bodies); LD Land Development

The number of water conservation and harvesting activities accounted for the maximum share in total works undertaken under NREGA, followed by draught proofing, rural irrigation and renovation of water bodies. The work relating to WCH was the highest in Aurangabad region and lowest in Nagpur region. In Konkan region, the works given priority were WCH, rural irrigation, renovation of water bodies and land development. In Nashik and Pune regions, 50-65 per cent of the activities were relating to WCH, rural irrigation and renovation of water bodies, whereas Amravati region showed 72 per cent activities relating to draught proofing. Thus, the works under

NREGA in Maharashtra were mainly concentrated on irrigation and water conservation related activities since irrigation is the major problem of the state. The growth in agricultural sector chiefly depends on irrigation facilities and, therefore, it was given foremost priority under NREGA in Maharashtra.

Coping Strategies

In order to strengthen the implementation of NREGA, a number of strategies need to be initiated, which include removal of the ceiling of 100 days of employment, changing employment provision from household to an individual entitlement, ensuring running of the scheme in federal manner, undertaking capacity building of locally elected bodies through advocacy efforts, incorporating skilled activities into NREGA, incorporating project mapping for the entire country in the next 3-4 years, evolving of a NREGS employment calendar to tap the supply of labourers during the agricultural slack season, ranking NREGA districts using appropriate performance evaluation criteria, developing recognition and reward mechanisms for NGOs, social actors, animators, civil society organizations, etc. (Shah, 2009).

Conclusions

Although there has always been a debate about the effectiveness of NREGA in terms of coverage of the target group, and also it is criticized on two grounds that it is expensive and corruption will not allow it to succeed, the experience of Maharashtra shows that it is partly true. The scheme is successful in terms asset creation, watershed development, prevention of draught, large scale administration of rural public works and reduction in large scale migration. The scheme is also successful in terms of coverage of weaker sections of the society. However, the major problem relates to the employment generation as the mandays generated and the number households provided 100 days of employment are quite low in almost all the districts of Maharashtra. With the sole exception of providing employment opportunities to the weaker sections of the society, the Act has not been able to succeed in any of its other provisions. In Maharashtra, only 34 per cent households registered under NREGA received job cards, which is quite a low proportion. The wages offered under NREGA are low in several districts of the state, which could be due to improper methods of measurement of productivity. The other problems relating to wages encompass lack of information on the part of workers about wage rates for different kinds of work in different types of terrain, lack of their bargaining power, fudging of muster rolls leading to low wage payment, difficulty in understanding the mode of payment-mix of cash and kind as prescribed in Maharashtra, etc. However, the NREGA is much better scheme than any other employment related programmes. It has still to do a lot of catching to make its presence felt in different parts of the country. The linking of employment guarantee schemes with other schemes of public works will certainly improve skill levels among workers, though this will require improved levels of coordination in the public sector.

End Notes

1. Gujarat experienced a 4 percentage point increase (over the HCR in 1983) in the HCR during the 1987-8 drought, whereas poverty continued to fall in Maharashtra through this crisis. This indicates that though poverty decline in Maharashtra could have been better, the EGS certainly enhances security.
2. A list of permissible works is given in Schedule I of the Act. These are concerned mainly with water conservation, minor irrigation, land development, rural roads, etc. However, the Schedule also allows “*any other work which may be notified by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government*”.
3. The districts included under NREGA in Maharashtra were: Phase I (2006) – Ahmednagar, Amravati, Aurangabad, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Dhule, Gadchiroli, Gondia, Hingoli, Nanded, Nandurbar and Yavatmal; Phase II (2007) – Thane, Wardha, Buldhana, Osmanabad, Akola and Washim; Phase III (2008) – Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Nashik, Jalgaon, Pune, Satara, Sangli, Solapur, Kolhapur, Jalna, Parbhani, Beed, Latur and Nagpur.

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