

Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on the Rural Marginal Producers: A Study in Odisha

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Abstract: The state of Odisha constitutes conjoining urban, rural and tribal characteristics by maintaining its divergent geo-political situations, socio-economic living conditions and varied demographic constellations. Governing the state with a balancing act of maintaining equilibrium among these dynamics has been yet a challenge. However, the government through its state machineries and support of the civil societies has been endeavouring in maximizing the delivery of services and implementing the schemes and programmes by reaching out to every section of society equitably. The state government has felt the need of implementing 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' (hereafter MGNREGS) as a rural and tribal people's entitlement for their economic engagements and builds their village infrastructures. The present paper deals with the impact of this largest state funded public employment scheme on marginal producers in the state of Odisha, which becomes a favourable region for the implementation of this schemes from the standpoint of its socio-economic, geo-political and demographic characteristics. The present study finds that, the people of the state have demand for the jobs under the scheme. The state government has been playing a crucial role in implementing the scheme on a priority basis to provide employment to the people of the rural areas and tribal belts of the state.

Key words: MGNREGS, Marginal Producers, Rural Areas and Tribal Areas of Odisha

Date of Submission: 05-10-2017

Date of acceptance: 18-10-2017

I. INTRODUCTION

Odisha is the eleventh most populous state in India as per the 2011 Census with 4.19 crore population contributing 3.47 per cent to the total population of India. Over the last decade, the state has witnessed a 14 per cent growth in its population. Most of this population is concentrated in the rural areas with the urban population constituting only 17 per cent. According to the Planning Commission's Tendulkar Committee Report 2009, the poverty headcount ration of Odisha, at 57.2 per cent, is the worst among all Indian states and is way above the national average of 37.2 per cent. If factors beyond income are considered (Multidimensional Poverty Index)¹, about 63.2 percent of the people in Odisha live below the poverty line. Rural poverty, at 60.8 per cent, is also significantly higher than the urban poverty, which is 37.6 per cent, and the worst in India. Further, the extent of poverty is not evenly distributed in all the regions and among all social groups of Odisha. The Scheduled Castes (hereafter SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (hereafter STs) are mostly the rural marginal producers of the state. They have a high incidence of poverty as compared to the SCs and STs in the country as a whole². In the recent past in September 2013, a panel headed by RBI Governor Raghuram Ranjan has a new index of backwardness and ranked Odisha as India's most backward State and Bihar the second. Against this backdrop, it is imperative to study in understanding the impact of the scheme on the life of the rural marginal producers, the poorest of the poor in the state and make policy suggestions for their improvement.

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¹ The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), Published in the 2010 Human Development Report. For detail refer the Report.

² For more details refer IAMR and Planning Commission, India Human Development Report 2011.

The setting, where the present study was conducted consisted of two districts namely Koraput and Khordha. The former is the tribal belt with highest concentration of tribal people and the later is a coastal rural area almost no

Box-1
Phase wise rollout of the scheme
Phase-1: Bolangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Ganjam, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Kendujhar, Koraput, Malkangiri, Mayurbhanja, Nabarangapur, Nuapada, Rayagada, Sambalpur, Sonapur, Sundargarh.
Phase-2: Baragarh, Anugul, Balesore, Bhadrak, Jajpur.
Phase-3: Nayagarh, Kendrapada, Jagatsingpur, Puri, Cuttack, Khordha.

presence of the tribal people. The district of Koraput falls under the first phase of the implementations of MGNREGS among the nineteen (19) districts where the Scheme was rolled out in the first phase during February 2007. The district of Khordha included under the third phase that commenced in April 2008 with other five districts such as Nayagarh, Kendrapada, Jagatsingpur, Puri and Cuttack.

About the demand of the scheme is observed in the last four financial years' (2013-2017) data analysis. It is found that, the budget allocations of the scheme show there was a consistent demand of employment under the Act. The website of the ministry of Rural Development, Government of India depicts that, the state of Odisha in the financial year (FY) 2013-2014

had the total budget allocation of 595 lakhs rupees against Persondays Generated requirement budget of 711.82 lakhs rupees; FY 2014-2015 was 633.13 lakhs rupees against Persondays Generated requirement budget of 535.4 lakhs rupees; FY 2015-2016 was 760.06 lakhs rupees against Persondays Generated requirement budget of 894.46 lakhs rupees; and FY 2016-2017 was 800 lakhs rupees against Persondays Generated requirement budget of 800 lakhs rupees. In the calculation, it is observed that, the state has a deficit budget of 129.88 lakhs rupees. For the FY 2017-2018 the budget allocation has been 900 lakhs rupees and the Persondays Generated so far has been 139.85 lakhs rupees that is more than 15% of the total allocated budget that has been implemented so far. Due to the effect of demonetization, it is predicted that more number of employments probably required to be generated. Besides, the fate of monsoon will also put a condition on the determination of the requirement of the budget. But the major concern felt by the participants of the scheme face is non-payment of wages on time. Recently, the Hon'ble Supreme Court expressed a concern regarding the nonpayment of wages to the MGNREGA workers on time by Government of India (the Supreme Court Case Writ Petition (C) No. 857/2015).

Who is a Marginal Producer?

The Persons engaged in an activity connected with, or related to, primary produce³; people engaged individually or a group in activity that produces a small amount of a product or crop with high production costs and little or no profit.

As a working definition for this study marginal producer is understood and considered by the researcher as all the households of the rural and tribal villages who produces being engaged in agriculture, forest, fisheries, horticulture, poultry, art, craft and other farm and nonfarm or off farm activities at an individual or group capacity. The marginal producers often sell their produces in the market with a very lesser or no profit or even sometimes loss. It is also situation for them that, they either sometimes have to remain unemployed for a longer period, underemployed or disguisedly employed most of the time living in their villages or hamlets in the rural and tribal areas. Looking into the general situations in the rural and tribal demographic situations of the state, the present study categorically considers and exclusively deals with the SCs, STs and Women as marginal producers who have been engaged in the abovementioned activities living in the rural and tribal areas of Koraput and Khurda districts of Odisha.

A brief outline of the Scheme

The flagship scheme under a central legislation in its nature and scope for providing public employment in anywhere in the world, the MGNREGA completed a decade of its existence in the country in 2016. Amidst political oppositions and policy differences between the ruling political party and the opposition, the scheme continues to have widespread acceptance of the republic for its relevancy, necessity and demand in the country.

The MGNREGA was notified on September 5, 2005 and implemented in three phases covering all districts over time. Although the focus was on augmenting wage employment, it is ambitious in scope and aims to accomplish a number of things. Amongst other things, the Act envisaged that the works undertaken as part of the scheme would strengthen natural resource management and address causes of chronic poverty like drought,

³ Producer Company under Companies Act, 2013

deforestation and soil erosion, thereby encouraging sustainable development. While there is a fairly rich documentation of the impacts of the MGNREGA as a safety net programme on wages, income and consumption, a very little is known about the nature of assets created and their impacts on peoples' lives. Indeed, the MGNREGA is frequently thought of as a poverty alleviation scheme through the creation of wage employment for unskilled labourers and not much else. The fact that, it is not simply a work creation programme but derives its legitimacy from being an asset creation programme is often overlooked. When it is not, there is a widespread belief that assets created under MGNREGA are of dubious usefulness.

In order to eradicate poverty in rural areas, several anti poverty programmes like the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) of 1980-89; Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) of 1983- 89; Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) of 1989-1990; Employment Assurance Scheme (EAS) of 1993-99; Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY) of 1999-2002; Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana (SGRY) of 2001; National Food For Work Programme (NFFWP) of 2004 etc, were launched by the Central Government in phased manner and implemented through the State Governments across the country. Amongst the above NREGA was one of the most popular and successful programme which was renamed on October 2, 2009 as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act .

The broad aim of the Act as stated by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India is "enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work".

The rationale, significance and objectives of the study

Studies reveal that MGNREGA has helped rural households in a sustained manner to smoothen the consumption between the agricultural peak season and lean season. Klonner and Oldiges (2013, 2014) reported in their research that, the poverty gap between Phase I and Phase II districts has decreased. In the present study, it was found that, between the Phase I and Phase III, Koraput in the Phase I district out performs that of the Phase III district of Khordha. The rationale and significance of the study therefore, has been self-explanatory in the topic itself. The researcher dealt with the subject from its bottom-up, people-centered, demand-driven, self-selecting, rights-based and marginalized & vulnerable groups' inclusive growth-oriented design. The present research has been a humble attempt stemmed from the self-fulfilling interest that proceeded towards the investigations that ultimately resulted to contribute to the policy directives for the effective and efficient implementation of the scheme for the aggressive socio-economic upward mobility of the rural marginal producers. It primarily aimed at identifying issues pertaining to the effective and efficient implementation of MGNREGS in the state of Odisha; studying the impact of MGNREGS on the process of promotion livelihoods of the rural marginal producers in the state of Odisha; and studied the impact of MGNREGS in reducing distress migration in the state of Odisha.

II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present study collected information and data from both primary and secondary sources for generalising (i.e., statistical inferences). The methodology included reference to the publication research, executed structured interview schedules and conducted some case studies. It also included present and past information about employment programmes in the country. The study followed mixed methods research design. The sample size of total 300 (50:50) Job Card holder households were purposively selected from the two districts falling under the Phase I and Phase III categories to understand the impact of the scheme on the marginal producers. The phase one district included Koraput and the Phase three district has been Khordha. The data were collected from the 10 GPs i.e. 5 GPs each from the two districts. The sample GPs were selected based on the highest percentage of registration of the marginal producers (SCs, STs and Women) in the scheme. Proportionate random sampling method has been followed for gathering participants or sample units for this study since the population/marginal producers are composed of SCs, STs and Women and thus, their number relative to the entire population determines the number of participants or sample units from each category.

Table 1*
No. of workers registered in MGNREGA in the sample GPs of Semliguda block of Koraput district

GPs	SC		ST		WOMEN		Total Sample Units
	% of registration	Sample Units	% of registration	Sample Unit	% of registration	Sample Units	
CHRANGU L	19.53	5	46.64	12	50.26	13	30
DALEIGUDA	11.68	3	50.14	14	50.08	13	30
DUDHARI	9.07	3	49.03	13	50.14	14	30
GUNTHAPUT	13.73	4	39.37	11	51.79	15	30
HATAGUDA	7.52	2	34.9	12	49.88	16	30
Total	--	17	--	62	--	71	150

*Sample drawn based on the information on the MGNREGA, 2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (Odisha)

The above table depicts the respondents who have been registered to volunteer to do the manual work under the MGNREGA. The table explains about the sampling method of the present study. The researcher has used the existing data of the government on the work registration to select the sample units for the study. Thus, the present study follows proportionate random sampling method to select the respondents from among the registered workers who are the marginal producers in this study. In Koraput district, Semliguda block has been purposefully selected as the block is one among the largest geopolitical regions of the district consisting of 17 GPs and work of MGNREGA in progress. It was found that women are the largest participants of the scheme constituting 49.88% and therefore their representation was highest in the sampling i.e. 71 sample units out of total 150. Since, Koraput district is the tribal area, it was found that, the tribal participants are the majority in availing benefits under the scheme constituting 34.9 percent so their representation has been proportionately 62 sample units and SCs are the minority only having 7.52 percent in the workers' registration and therefore, 2 sample units have been randomly selected for the present study.

Table 2*
No. of workers registered in MGNREGA in the sample GPs of Baliana Block of Khordha district

GPs	SC		ST		WOMEN		Total Sample Units
	% of registration	Sample Units	% of registration	Sample Unit	% of registration	Sample Units	
Baliana	64.07%	17	1.56%	1	48.12%	12	30
Bentapur	47.07%	14	0%	0	50.31%	16	30
Benupur	40.59%	13	0%	0	49.20%	17	30
Bhingarpur	48%	14	0.07%	0	49.31%	16	30
Jagannathpur	46.97%	13	0.20%	0	48.94%	17	30
Total	--	71	--	1	--	78	150

*Sample drawn based on the information on the MGNREGA, 2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India (Odisha)

The above table depicts the selection of the sample units for the study from Khordha district taking the government published data and basing upon the field situations. It was found that Khordha district gives somewhat a different picture that of Koraput district that has been depicted in the table 1. In table 2, it is shown that, the SC people are the highest registered MGNREGA workers having 46.97 percent and the sample units are of 71 against almost absence of people belonging to tribal community. However, in both the districts, women are the largest participants of the scheme. The table 2 shows that, 48.94 percent registered women worker for the scheme and therefore, the largest 78 sample units are represented from the women marginal producers for this study.

III. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

General findings are brought and analysis has been made to the present study using secondary and field data on the impact of MGNREGA on the marginal producers in the state of Odisha. For the optimum accuracy and generalisation of the findings one district from the tribal areas and the other one from the coastal rural areas have been purposefully selected.

Report of the Committee for Revision of MGNREGA Operational Guidelines submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development Government of India stated that, the MGNREGA led to major increases in wages of rural workers. When the fact (attested by NSSO data on “landed labourers”) was recognised that, the majority of MGNREGA workers were impoverished small and marginal farmers, especially in the tribal areas, could see the direct impact MGNREGA has made on raising incomes of small and marginal farmers. The tightening of the labour market post-MGNREGA is a positive indicator of poverty alleviation and signals a pressure for technological advances that raise farm productivity in areas of relative labour shortage. This is the process of agrarian transformation the world-over.

Studies conducted by Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore; Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal; Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad and University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore have all concluded that, the MGNREGA works have had a positive impact on agricultural productivity. In one of the studies conducted in Chitradurga District of Karnataka, IISc found that MGNREGA works, besides enhancing agricultural productivity, successfully reduced water, soil and agricultural vulnerability. A study in Rajganpur block of Sundargarh district found that, a few durable assets had been created (Nayak, 2013).

Table 3: Distribution of Job Cards in the state of Odisha

Job Cards	Figures
Total No. of Job Cards issued to the households	62.98 Lakhs
Total No. of Workers	166.25 Lakhs
Total No. of Active Job Cards of the households	28.9 Lakhs
Total No. of Active Workers	47.22 Lakhs
SC worker against active workers	16.67%
ST worker against active workers	34.45%

Source: The MGNREGA, 2005, Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India (Odisha)

The table 3 states that, the total 62.98 lakhs job cards have been issued to the adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work under the scheme but total No. of them constitute 166.25 lakhs. However, the active job cards of the households are not impressive as it stands at 28.9 lakhs active job cards of the households (less than 50 per cent). As regards the active workers from the active job cards of the households it is 47.22 lakhs that is merely 28.4 per cent out of which SC workers constitute 16.67 per cent and the STs 34.45 per cent.

The figure 1 shows about the creation of employment under the scheme of MGNREGA. It depicts that, in the district of Koraput 37 per cent of the respondents viewed that, the scheme has created employment opportunity but the majority of the respondents denied being so. The situation is not that encouraging in case of Khordha district as the figure shows it was only 23 per cent of the respondents viewed that, the scheme has created employment and the majority of the respondents are saying no creation of the employment under the scheme.

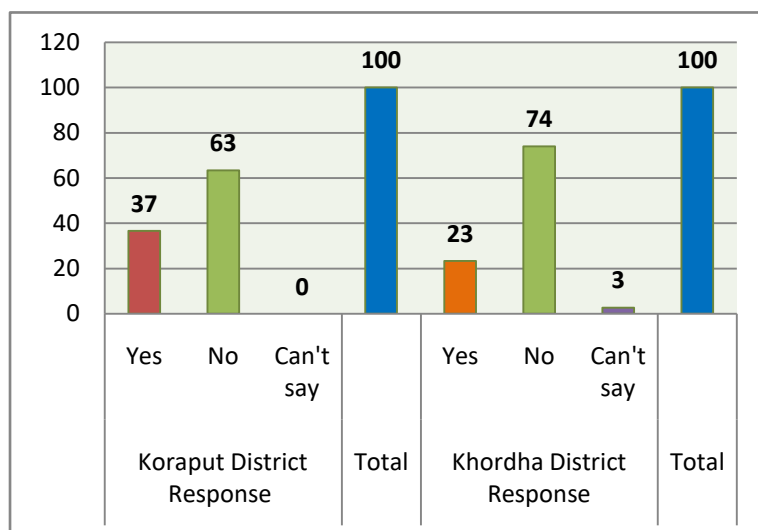
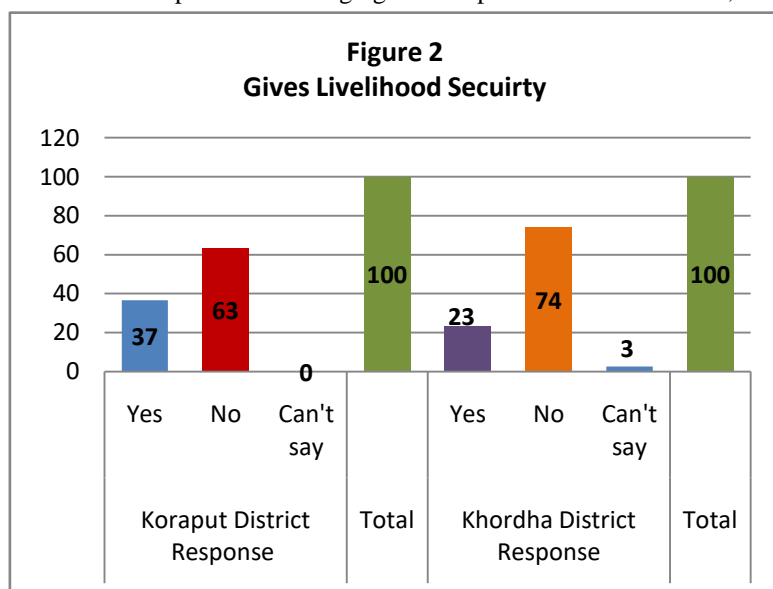


Figure 1 Creation of employment under MGNREGA
Source: Field Study

The figure 2 depicts about giving livelihood security to the respondents. It is depicted in the figure that, 37 per cent of the respondents belonging to Koraput district viewed that, the scheme under MGNREGA has provided



them a sense of livelihood security as against 23 per cent of the respondents of Khordha district. The reason behind to be so as found out during the discussions with the respondents that, in general, there has been a lack of provisions of employment engagement of the respondents on their demand. Fulfilling the job demands as per the guidelines has been the major factor of developing a sense of livelihood security among the respondents under the scheme as stated by the respondents in the present study.

Source: Field Study

S N	Important Impact indicators	Responses from Koraput District				Responses from Khordha District				Total	Grand total
		Yes	No	No Difference	Total	Yes	No	No Difference	Total		
1	Self respect in work	106 (71%)	30 (20%)	14 (9%)	150 (100%)	117 (78%)	8 (5%)	25 (17%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
2	Asset creation	40 (27%)	27 (18%)	83 (55%)	150 (100%)	109 (73%)	6 (4%)	35 (23%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
3	Impact on agricultural wages	118 (79%)	6 (4%)	26 (17%)	150 (100%)	131 (87%)	0	19 (13%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
4	Seasonal benefits	137 (91%)	3 (2%)	10 (7%)	150 (100%)	51 (34%)	0	99 (66%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
5	Strengthening grass root processes of democracy infusing transparency and accountability in governance	43 (29%)	71 (47%)	36 (24%)	150 (100%)	11 (7%)	63 (42%)	76 (51%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
6	Financial Inclusion	38 (25%)	101 (67%)	11 (7%)	150 (100%)	42 (28%)	17 (11%)	91 (61%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
7	Impact on women empowerment	103 (69%)	7 (5%)	40 (27%)	150 (100%)	97 (65%)	21 (14%)	32 (21%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
8	Active involvement of Panchayat activities	77 (51%)	48 (32%)	25 (17%)	150 (100%)	59 (39%)	18 (12%)	73 (49%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	
9	More helpful during natural disaster/crisis situations	133 (89%)	7 (5%)	10 (7%)	150 (100%)	141 (94%)	0	9 (6%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)	

10	Checked distress migration	73 (49%)	11 (7%)	66 (44%)	150 (100%)	38 (25%)	55 (37%)	57 (38%)	150 (100%)	300 (100%)
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Table 10 : Multiple Responses on the Important Impact of MGNREGA on the Marginal Producers

Source: Field Study

The table 10 depicts the multi responses of the respondents of both the districts exclusively about the impact of the scheme. The responses are optimistic and therefore, it provides a larger scope and ample of opportunity to the stakeholders of the scheme to understand the field reality of the implementation of the scheme and improve upon some areas that would make the scheme more people's need centric. It is shown in the table that the highest percentage of the respondents in both the districts of Koraput (71%) and Khordha (78 per cent) feel that they have gained self-respect through the MGNREGA work. Employment opportunity gave them confidence and they were no more the absolute dependents of the local unorganized employers for their livelihoods. However, there were 17 per cent of the respondents from Khordha district, did not feel any difference in this regard.

As regard creation of the asset as one among other mandates of the scheme, the table 10 shows that 27 per cent of respondents of Koraput district felt that, assets have been created through the scheme and the majority of the respondents (55 per cent) said that, they did not find any difference in this impact indicator. However, interestingly, in Khordha district the picture was different. Here, the majority of 73 per cent of the respondents said that, assets have been created through the scheme. About the impact on the agricultural wages, the above tables state that, 79 per cent of the respondents from Koraput district felt that, it has impacted positively on their agricultural wages and the percentage showing 87 per cent in case of the respondents in Khordha district.

The scheme gave seasonal benefits to the respondents in both the districts. The table 10 depicts that in Koraput district, the majority of 91 per cent of the respondents find the scheme benefiting them in the off-seasons when they are not in their self-economic engagements. However, the matter was not that magnitudes in case of Khordha district as it is only 34 per cent of the respondents agreed to the point that, the scheme gave seasonal benefits. The respondents of this district of the opinion that, since the block is situated attached to capital city of Bhubaneswar, so their livelihoods are more depended on the city than the scheme.

The scheme has given space for strengthening grassroots processes of democracy as viewed by 29 per cent of the respondents from the Koraput district and 7 per cent of the respondents of Khordha district. The majority of the respondents in both the district said that, there has been a need of strengthening the grassroots process of democracy infusing transparency and accountability in governance. It was found that, 25 per cent of the respondents from Koraput viewed that, they were financially included due to the scheme as against 28 per cent of the respondents from Khordha district.

On the women empowerment, the above table states that 69 per cent of the respondents from Koraput viewed that, the scheme has a direct impact on the women empowerment as more than equal views of the respondents came from Khordha district i.e. 65 per cent. It was found that, 51 per cent of the respondents of Koraput opined that there has been an active involvement of panchayat activities since the scheme rolled out as against 39 per cent in the district of Khordha. 89 per cent of the respondents belonging to Koraput district viewed that, the scheme is more helpful during emergencies like flood, draught and employment crisis like demontisation causing unemployment and 39 per cent of the respondents of Khordha district are of the same points of view.

On the points of checking migration as one among other mandates of the scheme, the table 10 shows that, 49 per cent of the respondents from the district of Koraput stated that, the scheme has checked the distress migration from their areas to towns and cities. In the case of Khordha district the figure showing 38 per cent of the respondents who viewed the same.

From the above multiple response table, it is analysed that, the scheme has in an average brought a positive impact on the lives of marginal producers of both the tribal and rural areas found in the present study.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The MGNREGS is one among the most need and right based welfare schemes for the state of Odisha. It will not be mistaken to view that, this scheme is the lifeline in the state from the standpoint of its socio-economic, geopolitical and demographic situations and persistent inequality in their dynamical continuum. If efficiently dealt with, the scheme has adequate potentialities to eliminate those unequal elements of socio-economic and geopolitical dynamics and that would lead to ensure society that is more equitable.

However, there are lapses in the implementation of the scheme that has to be overcome as earliest and to develop such thoughtful strategies to stop its repetitions. It is a general finding that payments of wages have been often delayed under the scheme and that needs to be checked. Awareness about the scheme like the entitlements of the participants, the process of application, demand for jobs, compensation in case of failure on the part of the government and such other empowering information has to be disseminated on a priority basis. Laxities have also been observed in the governance of the scheme like, renewing the job cards and taking initiatives in providing employment opportunities, which has to be looked into urgently with a serious note. There is a plenty of good will existing among the participants and the locality for this scheme that needs to be nurtured and applied in the planning processes for making the scheme more of a success by optimizing relieving distress, abject poverty and checking abated migration of the rural and tribal people. By doing so will ensure that, there is a sign of an improving quality of life of the people manifested mainly through fulfilling their day to day needs of food and nutrition, good health and better education for their children.

IMPORTANT NOTES AND REFERENCES

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IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Debi Prasad Biswal Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme on the Rural Marginal Producers: A Study in Odisha." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) , vol. 22, no. 10, 2017, pp. 78–83.