

To improve their socio-economic condition and to lead a life of dignity, persons with disabilities must be provided with employment opportunities. A study by Grassroots Research And Advocacy Movement (GRAAM) indicates that there are several barriers to inclusion of PwD in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) despite specific strategies provided in the 2013 Operational Guidelines of the Act.

Background

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) serves to enhance the income and economic security of the rural poor. In order to have greater impact, MNREGA should target the vulnerable sections for participation. Persons with Disabilities (PwD) are among the most marginalized in society, and are therefore economically very vulnerable. The way to raise PwD out of poverty is to provide them with jobs, so that they may support themselves and have increased dignity. Many PwD are capable of working, and should be given priority for inclusion in MNREGA works. MNREGA guidelines state that PwD should be provided with suitable work, but implementation has fallen short in Karnataka. The study undertaken by GRAAM reveals the existence of several barriers to inclusion of PwD in employment opportunities.



Facts from the Ground

GRAAM conducted a survey of 454 PwD in 5 Gram Panchayats (GP) across four Taluks in Kolar District to understand the status of inclusion of PwD in MNREGA. The study included interviews and discussions with PwD and their family members, during which they

revealed their belief that PwD can work and should work for their own dignity. The need for jobs for these PwD under MNREGA is also well established.

- 79.1% of households reported a need for a MNREGA job, but only 34% received a job card.
- 66.4% of families surveyed believe PwD can work under the MNREGA program.
- 82.1% of PwD surveyed are in the productive age group of 18-60 years.
- 47.1% of PwD in the productive age group are in need of MNREGA jobs. The requirement is higher (54.8%) in the age group of 36-45 years.

Barriers to Inclusion of PwD

Low levels of Awareness & Participation

- Only 34.79% of PwD surveyed knew of MNREGA and only 5.95% knew of the exclusive MNREGA Gram Sabha, while just 1.54% of PwD surveyed, had participated in the MNREGA Gram Sabha.
- Only 48.8% of families of PwD were aware about MNREGA and 38.1% of families did not apply for MNREGA jobs, mainly because they did not know about the application process.
- Only 34% of families surveyed have a job card. Of the families with a job card, 36.73% have not included names of PwD on the card.
- 41.5% of families in need of MNREGA have not received employment opportunities, and of these 65.6% also failed to get an unemployment allowance as most of them were not aware of this provision.
- Of those employed, only 10.47% got 100 days of work and 48.84% got fewer than 50 days.
- 57.9% of families of PwD are not involved in any self-help groups (SHG), thus resulting in them having low social capital.

Blind Beliefs and Misconceptions

- About 15% of the families believed that the causes of disability were either witchcraft/black magic or God-given punishment for sins in previous lives
- Most families worried that working will increase the severity of disability.
- Among families that do not encourage PwD to work in MNREGA, nearly 57% feel that PwD lack the required physical and mental capability, 26.6% say it is not necessary because other family members are working, and 12.7% felt that they would face discrimination if a PwD in the family works.

Policy Limitations

- No provision for PwD to have independent job cards
- The MNREGA application does not include a place to include disability status, so PwD enrolled in MNREGA are by default, not by design.
- The Act does not explicitly mention employment guarantees to PwD and the decision is left to the States
- Lack of substantial efforts to sensitize and guide implementing officials about inclusion of PwD

Lack of responsiveness from Gram Panchayaths

- GPs lack information about the number of PwD in their area, and therefore cannot effectively account for them. There are variations in the counts of PwD among different sources.
- GPs are not aware of circular issued from the State about inclusion of PwD or about the provisions mentioned in the Operational Guidelines of MNREGA.
- Resistance from GP members in getting a job under MNREGA was cited by 20.6% of PwD, while about 6% cited resistance by GP personnel or work executing department.

In addition to these, there are issues of perception that PwD should be cared for instead of being given work and apprehensions about reactions from others when relaxations in work environment and output are made for PwD, especially among GP members. Other issues include corruption and the need to pay bribes as cited by 32.4% of the respondents and resistance from community members and misplaced beliefs that PwD are unable to work.

Recommendations

Raising awareness levels and sensitization of all stakeholders coupled with policy action is needed to achieve greater inclusion of PwD in MNREGA.

- Specific programs to raise awareness about the causes of disability as well as the social model of viewing disabilities among PwD, their family members, members of Gram Panchayath and other community leaders
- Activities to spread awareness and information among PwD and their families about their rights under MNREGA and corresponding orientation to PRI officials.
- Ensuring the presence of a district level coordinator who will work with the Gram Panchayat to enable the inclusion of PwD in MNREGA, facilitate PwD to apply for jobs and track the inclusion of PwD in MNREGA
- Encouraging PwD to join Self-Help Groups (SHG) and participate in the activities
- Rigorous implementation of Operational Guidelines of MNREGA on inclusion of PwD including the creation of appropriate work opportunities for PwD

About GRAAM

GRAAM (Grassroots Research And Advocacy Movement) is a public policy research and advocacy initiative based in Mysore, India focusing on research incorporating grassroots perspectives and advocacy based on empirical evidence that reflects community 'voice' and is characterized by a collaborative approach. Incubated in Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (www.svym.org) for about 3 years since its inception in January 2011, GRAAM has undertaken research, evaluation, consultancy projects and advocacy initiatives in the sectors of public health, education, sanitation, nutrition, human development, livelihoods, disabilities, CSR and media. For more information, please visit www.graam.org.in

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