

**In India, 70% of Persons with Disabilities live in the rural areas with meagre means of gainful employment so that they can improve their economic condition and live with dignity. A survey by Grassroots Research And Advocacy Movement (GRAAM) indicates that less than 1% of the PwD interviewed had received vocational training. In this scenario, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act becomes an important source of economic and employment support for PwD in rural areas. The Operational Guidelines of the Act also provides strategies for inclusion of PwD in the scheme, but implementation is lacking. The States must take affirmative action in this regard on priority.**

## Background

MNREGA serves to augment the income of the rural poor, provide opportunities to engage in work that enhances their economic security. In order to affect the most positive change, MNREGA should target the vulnerable among poor for ensuring their participation. Persons with Disabilities (PwD) are among the most marginalized in society and too often belong to low socio-economic stratum. Despite the fact that disability can happen to anyone, existing programs have not attempted to address their needs to ensure their engagement and participation. In the study conducted by GRAAM, it was observed that a large segment (42%) of PwD belonged to the Scheduled Castes, 4% belonged to the Scheduled Tribes and 15% belonged to other backwards classes. Most of them do not have formal education and are deprived of opportunities to work and engage in their communities. Engaging in meaningful work in their communities not only ensures that PwD have a livable income to support their families but also improves their feeling of self-worth and dignity. Many PwD are capable of working, and when given an opportunity and inclusive environment they can contribute substantially. As evidenced by the overall prevalent data worldwide, 80% of PwD in developing countries live in rural areas and have limited resources to engage in their communities. MNREGA is a powerful tool that has potential to substantially impact the poverty among people living in rural areas, especially for PwD.

## Facts from the Ground

GRAAM conducted a survey of 454 PwD in Kolar district of Karnataka to understand the importance and effectiveness of MNREGA as a means of employment for PwD and their inclusion. The study included interviews with PwD, their family members and Gram Panchayat leaders about the socio-economic status of PwD, the need for jobs, and their awareness & participation levels with respect to MNREGA.

## Why MNREGA should be Inclusive of PwD

### Low Economic Status

- Most of (71%) the PwD in the productive age group fall within less than Rs 1200/- month income category
- 70% families do not own any immovable property and 93% own no movable assets
- Only 3% of families of PwD are in the position to access treatment for serious illness without any difficulty. 65% of families borrow money from others for accessing the treatment
- 97% of families of PwD have a ration card. But only 21% of them have an Anthyodhaya card, which is actually an entitlement of all families of PwD.
- Around 54% of the families had fewer meals due to shortage of food in the last one year.
- The only social entitlement reaching to majority (62%) of the PwD surveyed is the "disability pension". 14% have not received any type of benefit from authorities, government or otherwise.

### Lack of Dignity and Social Capital

- Some families don't want PwD to work because they think they should be cared for. However, PwD report that they want jobs for their own dignity, besides earning a livelihood.
- 15% of families believed the causes of disability were either witchcraft/black magic or God-given punishment for sins in previous lives, demonstrating continued attitudinal barriers to the inclusion of PwD.
- 83% of the families surveyed have not had an opportunity to be part of any of the community governance systems (SDMC, VHSC, other Gram Panchayath committees or village collectives).

- 58% of families of PwD are not involved in any self-help groups (SHG), potentially resulting into a lower social capital.

### Lack of Other Job Opportunities

- Although 69% of the respondents have land, only 35% of the families said agriculture is their primary source of income.
- 69% of families are dependent on non-continuous or largely seasonal employment for income.
- 69% of PwD responded that there are no job opportunities for them in their villages.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGD) have revealed that either PwD have difficulty finding work, and when they do find work, employers do not give them comparable wages.
- Only 34% of the PwD (18-60 yrs) are employed. Among the employed 54% lack required training, only 36% have sufficient aids and equipment to perform their job and 38% are not aware of the provision of assistive tools or aids at workplace.



### Recommendations

- Awareness on MNREGA should be increased through all channels, most importantly through word-of-mouth.
- Inclusion of disability status in MNREGA application, and facilitation to PwD to apply specifically for jobs
- Ensure the presence of designated and functional coordinator at the district level who is sensitive towards disability issues and inclusion of PwD

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- Training of GP members and functionaries to be aware of and sensitive to disability issues and on operational guidelines of MNREGA.
- Education to remove misconceptions and blind beliefs among family members and communities.
- Creating appropriate work opportunities for PwD in the GPs including one exclusive program involving PwD. Initiatives from other states could be adopted.
- Introduction of separate and independent job cards and more number of working days for PwD
- Awareness and information to PwD and their families about their under MNREGA.
- Raise awareness about the causes of disability and the social model of viewing disability.
- Encourage PwD to join self-help groups (SHG) form exclusive PwD Kayaka Sangha

### 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](http://www.svym.org)) for about 3 years since 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](http://www.graam.org.in)

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